

A Charming Christmas Novelette and Seasonable Articles will appear next week.

THE LONDON READER

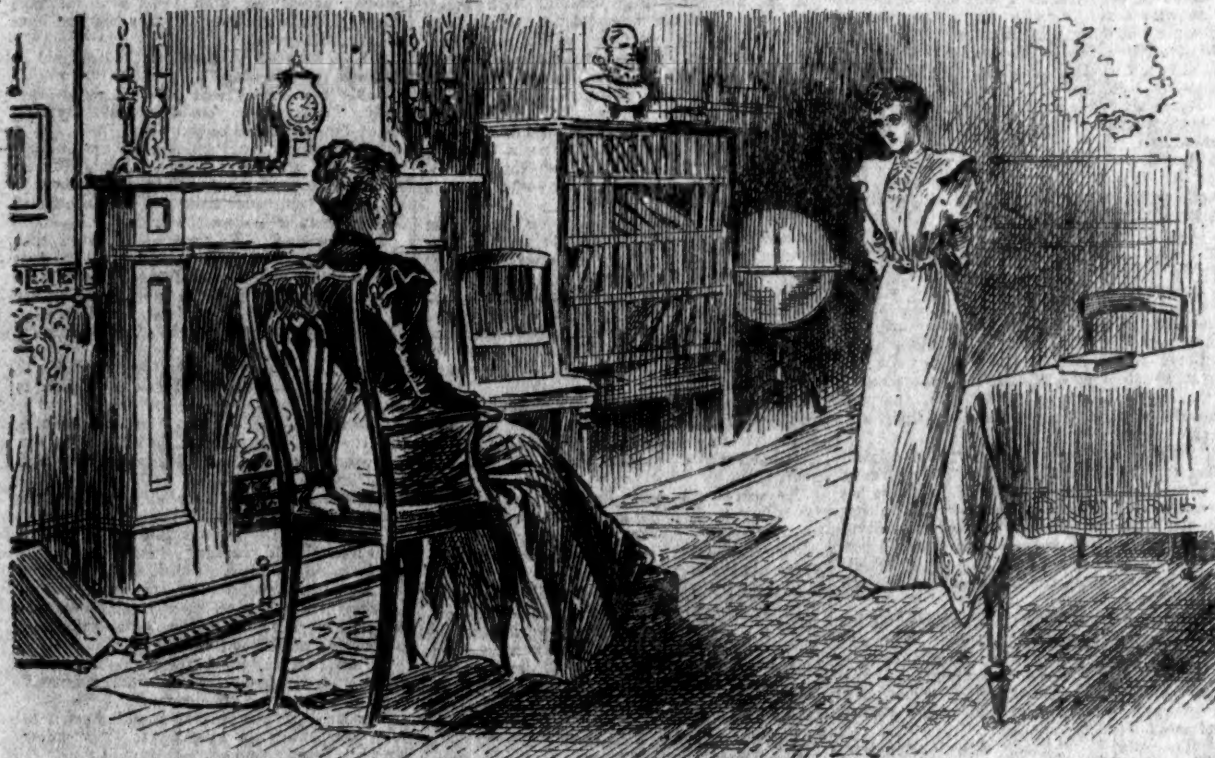
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"YOU MUST KNOW ALL, PLEASE AUNT; I HAVE RUN AWAY FROM HOME, AND MY HUSBAND THINKS ME VERY WICKED," SAID MAUDE CLINTON.

A FOOLISH YOUNG COUPLE.

By the Author of

By the Author of "George Simpson's Luck,"
"Bory's Engagement," etc., etc.

[A NOVELETTE.]

Completes in this Number.

CHAPTER I.

THE scene was the cosy dining-room of a very small suburban home. The fire burnt brightly, the table was nicely, and even elegantly, arranged; but the two people seated at it had not brought to the meal the contented mind compared by the wise man to a continual feast.

They were both as cross as they well could be, and the misfortune of it was that this was not their first quarrel—no, nor yet their sixth or seventh—though they had only been married about three months, and had certainly been, or believed themselves to be, desperately in love with each other.

It had not been a runaway match, or a very rash marriage.

Lovel Clinton had a very snug post in the office of a London newspaper. His income was three hundred a year, and might soon become more.

Maude Rosatur was the daughter of a country clergyman, richer in children and piety than in money.

So it came about that his second daughter, being clever, had to earn her bread, and became junior teacher in a high school for girls, not three miles from the suburban villa before referred to.

Lovel and Maude met at the house of a mutual friend, were introduced, and fell in love with each other on the spot.

They were married after a six months' engagement, which gave time for Lovel to be received as a relative at the rural vicarage, and for his betrothed to offer the school authorities the full three months' notice, to which they were entitled.

Then there had been a modest wedding at Dalberg Church, and, after a week spent in Scotland, the young couple came "home" to

Rosemary Villa, West Ledworth, and fairly settled down as married people.

But, unfortunately, Mrs. Rosatur, with the best intentions (it seems to me all the fatal mistakes of life are committed with the best intentions) had given her daughter a parting warning, which was destined to do much to mar the domestic peace of Rosemary Villa.

"You know, Maude," said the good lady, who had brought up ten children on a smaller income than the one her son-in-law possessed at the present moment, "you are a very lucky girl, and it is not every man in Lovel's position who would have chosen a wife without a penny. Do try and get domesticated, my dear, and leave off your studious habits. It was very different when you had to earn your living by teaching, but now your chief object ought to be to make your husband comfortable."

Ill-omened advice. Maude, who had spent her girlhood in cramming for examinations, and her last three years in cramming other people, considered learning the one thing needful in life, and perfectly despised the more homely qualities recommended by her mother.

Still, she was very much in love, and but for that unlucky suggestion of Mrs. Rossiter's, she might have tried to busy herself with domestic matters.

But, alas! the charming young lady possessed a rather contradictory temper, and her defects being pointed out to her was the very way to make her continue them.

"I'm sure I never asked him to marry me!" she thought, contemptuously; "and as to being so very lucky, if I had waited I daresay I should have met someone much richer. I don't see why I should be so very 'grateful' to Lovel for condescending to marry me!"

Fortunately for Mr. Clinton's peace of mind, though his wife despised trifles, she had an intense horror of debt. She would have starved rather than buy anything she could not pay for; and she had the sense to know that if she did not take an active part in household affairs herself, she must get someone who could, or else live in a perpetual muddle. It followed, therefore, that a very respectable widow was engaged as general factotum, and Mr. and Mrs. Clinton had no cause to complain of their choice.

Rosemary Villa was kept in a state of immaculate order. There was no waste and no stint.

Mrs. Reeves required twenty pounds a year for her services; but there is no doubt they were quite worth that to her employers in point of comfort.

But, oh! the reproaches, the scandals, the excitement Mrs. Reeves caused in West Ledworth.

Rosemary Villa was situated in a cheerful road, where most of the houses being of the same size and status, it fell out that everyone knew a great deal about everyone else.

Lovel had lived there for three years and knew about a score of families, whose means were, perhaps, similar to his own, and who thought a "girl" the summit of their own requirements.

"They do say," said Mrs. Carrington, next door, to Miss Grimly, opposite, "Mrs. Clinton is that stuck-up she won't even go inside her own kitchen. What can there be to do in that bit of a house with everything new; and yet she must needs have a grand housekeeper, who wears a silk dress on Sundays! She'll bring her husband to the workhouse in no time!"

But Miss Grimly, whose nature was milder than her name, dissented.

"They do say young Mrs. Clinton is very clever, and perhaps she works hard at something else than housekeeping. She's not extravagant in other things, and she's always a pleasant word for anyone."

"Has she!" retorted Mrs. Carrington. "Why, when I ran over the first morning they were home, just to be neighbourly, she sent out word she was engaged, and I've been told since she never does see anyone who calls in the morning, be it who it may."

And Maude's unassociableness was the cause of quarrel number one. Lovel, who had spent his bachelor days in lodgings in that very street, and knew many people could not understand why his wife would not receive the advances of his neighbours more graciously.

"It must be so dull for you, Maude," he said, kindly. "With me away from nine to six, I should have thought you would be glad of a little company."

"I like to choose my company, Lovel. There is no one in this road with an idea in her head beyond servants and babies!"

"Well, you can't have the world full of Girtton girls," said Lovel, rather crossly, which was a decided snub, for Maude's proudest ambition had been to be a Girtton-girl herself, only poverty had nipped the aspiration in the bud.

"Well, women might have a little sense."

"The people about here have a great deal, and are very nice and neighbourly. When my mother stayed with me in the spring, she said she wouldn't wish for a pleasanter set of acquaintances."

"Her tastes are old-fashioned, perhaps?" "She is a lady!" said Lovel, rather hotly, "and an educated woman, even if she doesn't despise everyone who isn't blue!"

Of course Maude retorted, and that was quarrel number one. Number two was on the subject of a reading society to which Mrs. Clinton wished to belong, and her husband objected on the grounds that the meetings were held two miles off, and he came home too tired to care to go so far in search of amusement.

Quarrels three and four were on trivial subjects; and alas! by that time the habit of squabbling was so firmly established that Mr. and Mrs. Clinton had "a few words" on every occasion.

Maude thought privately marriage was a very great mistake, and she would have been far happier had she remained a form mistress at the Ledworth High School, with ninety pounds a year and independence; while Lovel recalled all the warnings of his old friends when they heard he was engaged to a "learned lady," and began to fear, dimly, there had been more in their condolences than he had believed.

Now, Mr. Clinton, though nominally engaged in literary pursuits, was not a clever or imaginative man. He was sub-editor of the *Fleet Street Chronicle*, but he never wrote a line in its columns.

His duties consisted chiefly in seeing the numerous people who wished to interview the editor, and sifting from the crowd the few who really had any business with the chief.

He also conveyed the editor's sentences to his contributors in strictly business-like letters, couched in the third person. He received all communications and waded through them, selecting the most important for his superior's perusal.

He was a most useful man, and having been gifted by nature with a handsome face, by habit with a pleasant, courteous manner, he was deservedly popular with all chance comers.

He served the office honestly, and earned his salary fairly; but he had spent five years as a sub-editor without needing the slightest scrap of literary ability, and, as a fact, he possessed none.

Such being the case, it is hardly surprising he misunderstood his wife. He thought Maude the dearest girl in the world, but he was genuinely afraid of her cleverness, and hoped, by a judicious course of ignoring all intellectual topics and pursuits, to bring the gifted, high-spirited woman he had married to the same dead level of narrow-mindedness as his own female relations.

Poor Maude! Perhaps she was not so much to blame for the quarrels as she seemed, for pretty as was Rosemary Villa, admirable as was the comfort of its *menage*, the mistress of the little house was terribly, frightfully dull.

After a life of hard work, first as pupil then as teacher, to find herself from morning to night with no duties whatever was an alarming experience.

She was fond of music, but she could not afford to buy new songs or pieces repeatedly, so an hour's practice generally contented her.

She was clever at needlework, but her new trousseau left her no scope for this talent, and Lovel having invested in a complete new wardrobe just before his wedding, none of his garments needed mending.

Poor Maude! There was not a creature within reach she cared to visit, except the head-mistress of the High School and her late fellow-teachers. But as their hours of leisure were precisely the same as Lovel's—and he hated his wife out of the house when he was in it—it came about that the relaxation of a chat with them was denied to the young bride.

For six weeks she moped hopelessly. Her bright eyes grew dull and lustreless. She could hardly get through her days, so endless did they seem. Then a new idea seized her.

She said nothing to anyone, but Lovel could not but see the change.

Her old spirits returned. She went laughing and singing about the house; and Mr. Clinton, who was not a very far-seeing man, decided that his system had succeeded, and his pretty wife had at last bent her proud neck contentedly to the yoke of domestic life.

And this brings us to the dull November morning when the pair sat at breakfast, and unfortunately drifted into the quarrel before alluded to.

It came about so innocently. Things had been going much more smoothly of late, and really Mr. and Mrs. Clinton both seemed inclined to compete for the far-famed Dunmow fitch of bacon, and now a mere trifle destroyed their seeming harmony.

"By the way, Maude," said Clinton, putting down a letter he had been reading, "my mother is staying with Jane, and she says they will both run over this morning and have dinner with you."

"I am very sorry, Lovel, but I shall not be at home this morning."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Mr. Clinton, cheerfully. "You know you can't have anything to do but what can be put off."

"I am sorry your opinion of my engagements is so poor, but I repeat I shall not be at home this morning. It relations deem it correct to come over uninvited they should at least give their hostess timely notice."

Lovel winced. He was quite aware that Maude, in his own language, did not "hit it off" with his mother and Jane. He could believe they rather liked the idea of taking her by surprise, but all his hospitable ideas were outraged by the bare thought of refusing their visit.

"You'll stay at home, won't you, Maude?" he said, persuasively. "You see, mother is getting old, and—"

"Brixton is no distance," replied Maude, coolly. "If Mrs. Clinton had told me she was staying there I would have written and asked her to come over."

"People don't stand on ceremony with their relations," retorted Lovel, crossly.

"Precisely. And as your mother has waived all ceremony in inviting herself I am at liberty to do the same. I shall not be at home this morning, Lovel; and I will leave you to decide whether Mrs. Clinton would prefer us to stop her visit by telegram, or to suffer her to arrive at an empty house."

"I shall certainly not telegraph," he said, curtly. "It is your duty to remain at home."

Maude smiled a little scornfully. "As Mrs. Clinton did not trouble herself to write to me, it is not my place to let her know her visit is inconvenient."

And so the quarrel waged. In the end of it Lovel banged the door, and went off to Fleet Street a good half-hour before his time, leaving his wife without deigning to tell her whether he should telegraph to his mother or no.

Maude had a good cry when her lord and master had departed. Then she dried her eyes, took up a local time-table, and tried to ascertain at what hour her relations by marriage might be expected.

Chance assisted her speculations, since no train left Brixton for West Ledworth between a quarter to twelve and one, which only reached the latter station at one o'clock, the precise hour of early dinner at Rosemary Villa.

"They will come by the 11.45," decided Maude, "and get here soon after twelve. Of course, I can't be at home, but I do wish it hadn't been so. I shouldn't mind Jane, but Mrs. Clinton is so interfering!"

Which was strictly true. Among the many voices raised to warn Lovel of the dangers of marrying a blue stocking his mother's had been the loudest.

The mistake once committed she had tried to remedy it by the generous offer of coming to reside with the young couple, and undertaking all domestic management.

This self-sacrificing offer was refused, but

the fact that it had been made did not render Mrs. Clinton, senior, any more a favourite with her daughter-in-law.

There was nothing petty in Maude's nature. She did not like Lovel's "people," but she never resented his helping them according to his means. She was perfectly aware that "Jane," the careworn wife of a struggling City clerk, rarely had things in comfort at home; and so she summoned Mrs. Reeves, and between them a tempting little dinner was soon arranged.

"It is just possible your master may remember to put them off," Maude explained simply to her servant. "If not, they will be here soon after twelve."

"And when shall you be home, ma'am?" inquired Mrs. Reeves, who was a devoted believer in her young mistress.

"I really don't know," said young Mrs. Clinton, frankly. "I shall try and get back by three, because the afternoons are so dark and foggy. But I may be detained, so you had better not tell Mrs. Trimble and her mother any particular time."

"Very well, ma'am."

She was a very pretty girl, this brown-eyed bride whom Lovel had brought home so proudly in the summer, and there was a certain quiet dignity about her which made her look older than her two-and-twenty years.

She had been the only one in the band of High-School teachers without the peculiar stamp which comes in time to women who pass their lives in teaching and controlling others.

There was nothing groovy or narrow in Maude Clinton; only having been used to independence she had in character, face, eye, and in her whole appearance a dash of determination which might degenerate into obstinacy in time.

She was very nicely dressed. She had saved money, and a rich relation had come down besides with a handsome cheque and a set of furs as his contribution to the trousseau.

He was only Mr. Rossiter's distant cousin, but he was Maude's godfather, and had taken a fancy to the girl because her love of independence pleased and amused him.

A bad attack of gout had kept him away from the wedding, and being a great traveller he was but seldom at the handsome house at Surbiton, which was his nominal home; hence it arose that he and Lovel Clinton had never met.

Maude dressed herself in her long sealskin coat and small, soft fitting toque to match. She put her hands into her tiny muff, hung a neat Russia leather bag on her arm, and was ready to start.

Mrs. Reeves betrayed not the slightest curiosity. Her mistress had made more than one of these strange expeditions to London in the last month, and anyone less inquisitive than the old servant would have remarked that she never mentioned them to her husband—that she never returned laden with purchases, as is often the case with young ladies who make brief visits to the gay metropolis; and, lastly, that she could hardly have enjoyed any friend's hospitality, since she invariably returned with a fine healthy appetite.

"I don't like the looks of the weather, ma'am," said Reeves, respectfully, as she held open the door. "I suppose you couldn't possibly put off your journey till to-morrow?"

"I couldn't put it off for twenty pounds, Reeves," Maude said, gaily. "Have a good fire in the dining-room, and be sure you tell Mrs. Clinton, if she comes, that I am sorry I could not stay at home."

Reeves went back to her kitchen with a thoughtful face. Her lack of curiosity in Maude's doings arose from no want of interest in her mistress.

The widow had been a good deal tossed about of late years, and Rosemary Villa was quite a haven of peace to her; but she was not blind, and she could see perfectly the little cloud between the wedded pair.

Reeves inclined to her lady's side. She was a keen-witted woman, and she guessed the struggle Mrs. Clinton had to settle down into a domestic housewife; also she decidedly objected to Lovel's air of superiority.

"Men are not up to much, even the best of 'em!" moralised the old woman; "and I believe he dislikes her being clever, just because he isn't troubled that way himself. He's jealous of her brains, and she wears of his friends—that's what it is!"

CHAPTER II.

There is generally an unlucky member in most families, and Jane Trimble was the unsuccessful one among the Clintons. In reality twelve months younger than her brother Lovel, she looked years his senior. At seventeen she was a pretty girl, without much force of character, and she had fallen in love with the only son of a bank manager, when all promised well for their married life.

Though not clever, John Trimble was plodding and industrious, and devoted to his bride. For three years all went merrily, then John's father absconded with some of the Bank property, was arrested, and would have been put on his trial, but that death mercifully intervened.

Poor Jane Trimble! Though no fault of their own, she and her husband had a black cross set against their name. Most of their relations had lost money through the bank failure.

There was no pity for them in their native town; and when they migrated to London the Vicar of Westfield was thought a very confiding man, because he gave John a letter of introduction to a brother of his own, junior partner in a large city firm.

John got taken on as clerk, but the salary was so small that, though it had been raised three times in his eight years of service, it now only reached a hundred a year.

Maude Clinton did not know this.

Lovel never quite forgave Jane for her husband's loss of position. Part of their mother's income had been carried away in the bank failure.

The remaining daughters were pinched in toilets and amusements. Lovel said little, but there was a coolness between him and the Trimbles, and though Brixton and West Ledworth were but five miles apart, visits were rarely exchanged.

Poor Jane! If Maude had only known it, she was not to blame for the sudden invasion of Rosemary Villa.

"Don't you think Lovel's wife might like a day's notice?" suggested Mrs. Trimble, timidly, as her parent wrote the letter which brought about the quarrel at Rosemary Villa.

"If she can't keep her house presentable with that expensive servant it's more shame for her; and with three hundred a year she ought not to keep such a bare ladder that she'd have nothing to set before us!"

Jane winced. Meals at her house were so carefully calculated that an unexpected guest would have wrought the direst confusion.

"I like Maude," she said, thinking to change the subject; "she always looks so neat and trim."

"Ah, she knows how to spend my boy's money, there's no question about that. As to saving it, that's quite an 'her matter.'"

Well, they started—the plump, well-preserved widow of fifty turned, and the thin, anxious woman of twenty-eight, who looked so worn and troubled, and whose carefully turned black merino showed signs of mending. They came by the very train Maude had anticipated, and reached Rosemary Villa about an hour after its mistress had left home.

"Out!" exclaimed Mrs. Clinton, the bugles on her bonnet positively shaking with indignation. "Out! I never heard of such a thing! Why, I wrote yesterday to say we were coming!"

Reeves felt a great pity for herself. She had never seen old Mrs. Clinton before, but she "took her measure," as she would have termed

it, and was pretty sure she was desperately offended.

"If you please, ma'am," she explained, civilly, "Mrs. Clinton was obliged to go out. My master promised to telegraph to you; but in case he forgot it, mistress ordered dinner for one o'clock, and said I was to keep a good fire in the dining-room. It's beautifully warm in there if you and Mrs. Trimble will step in."

"I think we had better," said Jane, pleasantly. Then, as she followed her mother through the little hall, she whispered, "I dare say the telegram came after we had started."

"I call it all an insult," said the old lady, putting her feet on the fender, and glaring disapprovingly at the ruddy glow. "And what extravagance to have such a fire in an empty room!"

"Dinner will be ready at one," announced Reeves, politely. "Would you like to go upstairs, ladies, and take off your things?"

But both declined. Mrs. Clinton, because she would not leave the fire (though she had denounced it was extravagant), and Jane, because there seemed to her something impertinent in going to Maude's room without her express invitation.

"When will your mistress be in?" demanded Mrs. Clinton, when Reeves brought in dinner.

"She said it was uncertain, ma'am. She hoped to come by the three o'clock; but she thought it might turn foggy, and the train be delayed."

"Then she has gone to London?"

Reeves hated the questioner, but she had no choice as to the answer.

"I believe so, ma'am!"

"To London! And you actually speak as though she were in the habit of going constantly!"

"Not constantly, ma'am!" explained Reeves, horrified at the tone of the speaker. "My mistress has been more than once, and she has come back each time by the five o'clock train."

"Ugh!" Mrs. Clinton was not mollified. "I should have thought there were enough shops here for her to fritter away her husband's money at!"

Dinner dragged wearily, but it was through at last. Mrs. Trimble felt a strange desire to get away before Maude returned. She dreaded her mother's meeting her with such remarks as those with which she had treated Reeves.

"See, mamma," she observed, quietly, "it is clouding over, and there will be a thick fog soon. Don't you think we had better catch the next train?"

"No, I don't," snapped Mrs. Clinton. "Here I am, and here I mean to stay until my son comes home!"

"But Lovel will not be here till five, and I want to get back to baby!"

"Baby can do without you, or you may start at once, and I can follow when I please. I am not in my dotage yet."

She was a terrible woman when put out, and she was decidedly put out to-day. Used to a good deal of honour from her own children, Maude's rebellion was a surprise to her.

In Mrs. Clinton's opinion her daughter-in-law ought to have been pleased to give up any engagement for the sake of a visit from her husband's family.

Three o'clock came—the fog deepened. By half-past three you could not see across the road.

Jane fancied her mother was asleep, and stole out of the dining-room hoping to discover Mrs. Reeves and take counsel with her.

"Come in, ma'am," said the woman, civilly, when Mrs. Trimble knocked at the kitchen door. "You're getting fidgety about the weather, no doubt; but it's almost a straight line to the station, and I could walk it blindfold. When the mistress comes home I am sure she will spare me to go to the station with you."

"It isn't that," Jane was trembling strangely. "But do you think my sister-in-law has met with an accident? It is nearly four o'clock, and you expected her much sooner."

"She may have been detained. Anyway, she'll be here soon, ma'am. The master's due at five; and never yet has he come home and found her out of the house."

Jane took comfort.

"I wish we had not come," she said regretfully. "You see, my mother made so sure of finding your mistress at home. We had picked up the idea she rarely went out at all."

"More she does, ma'am—not enough to keep her in health, as I have made bold to tell her myself before now. I've wished now and again she'd have one of her sisters to stay with her. It's dreary for a young lady to be so much alone."

"I did not know she had any sisters!"

"A clear half-dozen, ma'am, and I ought to know, having been born and bred in Mr. Rossiter's parish myself. It was he married me to my husband a dozen years ago. I didn't think then I should ever take service with one of his little girls."

The kitchen was so much more cheerful than the dining-room that Jane Trimble would not have objected to a chair there for the rest of the afternoon; but, suddenly, she heard her mother's voice calling her imperatively.

"Jane, Jane! Come here this minute!"

Mrs. Clinton had woke up to find the fire grown dull, and the daylight almost gone. She had hurriedly sought about for a match to light the candles on the mantelpiece.

In her haste she had knocked over a dainty little basket which slung on three legs like a gipsy kettle, forming an elegant (though certainly unsteady) work-table.

All its contents were scattered on the ground, and, in picking them up, Mrs. Clinton discovered the true cause of her daughter-in-law's sudden journey to London.

Among the pieces of silk and flannel, among the labyrinths of tapes and cottons, was a half-sheet of notepaper folded in two.

An honourable woman would have replaced it without ever thinking of what it might be; but Mrs. Clinton would have asked what mother of an only son ever was strictly honourable where that son's wife was concerned?

Mrs. Clinton unfolded the half-sheet of paper, and read what was written on it. The result was those imperative cries for "Jane!"

Poor Mrs. Trimble thought her mother must have had an attack of nightmare, for the widow seized her hand and held it in a vice-like pressure while she fired off such exclamations as—

"The viper!" "The false sycamore!" "My boy's destroyer!" "Heaven have vengeance on the sinner!"

"Mother! mother!" cried Mrs. Trimble, frightened nearly to death. "What is the matter?"

"Read this," cried the widow, thrusting a half sheet of paper into her hand.

Now, Jane Trimble, despite eight years of galling poverty, had retained almost an ultra sense of honour. Had she known to whom the paper belonged, or how it had come into her mother's possession, nothing in the world would have induced her to read it.

But she was taken unawares, too bewildered to realise more than that something was the matter. She imagined the note to be one addressed to Mrs. Clinton herself, and conveying bad news of Maude or Lovel.

In an instant she had taken in the sense of the words and understood the hard, set look on her mother's face.

"MY DEAR LITTLE MAUDIE,—

"Meet me at the old place at 12.30, and I think we can arrange what you have so much at heart. Of course, you will not tell your husband. All's fair in love and war, so he must be kept in the dark a little longer."

—Yours always,

"R. G."

A clandestine attachment, meetings with an old lover, a ruined home and blighted name; such were the conclusions Mrs. Clinton drew from the letter.

Jane Trimble was more merciful. She herself had suffered much from the world's censure—though on her husband's account, not

her own—and she knew a little how undeserved it sometimes is.

Her sympathies were entirely with Maude, but she felt dimly conscious most people would adopt her mother's view.

"You must forget we have read it," she said, simply. "Remember it is a private letter, and was never meant for your eyes or mine."

"You are an idiot, Jane," said her parent, abruptly. "This letter," she clutched it passionately as she spoke, "shall not go out of my keeping until I give it into my son's. Poor, deluded boy, he will know then how miserably he has been deceived."

"It is hardly kind to tell him, mother."

"Kind!" cried Mrs. Clinton, indignantly. "Would it be kind, I wonder, to let him go on in his blindness, and actually believe that woman an angel? That is what I have heard him call her. 'My angel wife.' Ugh!"

"She may be able to explain everything," urged Jane. "Why, mother, 'R. G.' may be her grandfather."

"Both Mr. and Mrs. Rossiter are orphans," said the widow, coldly, "and neither of them ever had brother or sister. I remember poor Lovel saying so when I told him he was foolish for marrying into such a large family. He said that Maude (abundant name) had no relations except her brothers and sisters."

"'R. G.' may be a lady?"

"Oh, yes! It is so like a lady's writing," said her mother, scornfully; "and 'ladies' are so likely to talk about the 'old place,' and urge a wife to desert her husband? No, Jane. This letter will open Lovel's eyes!"

"And make him miserable," thought poor Jane; but she only said, gravely,

"I think I will leave you and go home alone, mother. John would not like me to be mixed up in a quarrel."

"Bother John!" said Mrs. Clinton. "As though a clerk on a hundred a year had a right to any opinion in our family matters. There, do you hear that knock? One of them has come home. I only hope it is that wretched girl. Won't I talk to her!"

But it was Lovel Clinton. He left his coat and hat in the hall, and came in with the cheery question,

"Maude, my dear, where are you?"

Mrs. Reeves, having no desire to be cross-questioned about her mistress's absence, had disappeared the moment after she had closed the door on her master.

"Your mother is here, Lovel," said Mrs. Clinton, rushing into her son's arms, which she filled, being somewhat stout. "She is your best friend, my boy, and will never desert you in the hour of adversity."

"I'm sure you're very good," said Lovel, still looking round the room as though seeking someone; "but I don't know of any adversity threatening me at present. Where's Maude?"

Mrs. Clinton pursed up her lips and sighed. Jane Trimble, who felt ready to cry, said, timidly,

"We haven't seen her yet, Lovel. I daresay she will be in soon."

"Why, this is the first time I ever found her out," exclaimed Lovel. "I can't understand it. Look at the fog. It isn't fit for a strong man to be walking in it, much less my poor little wife."

"We started before your telegram came," went on Jane, speaking very fast, as though she feared her mother would interrupt her.

"Of course, Maude couldn't be expected to stay at home if she had an engagement!"

"I hoped she would be able to put it off. I don't think I ever heard what it was!"

"Poor deluded boy!" said his mother, feelingly.

Lovel looked bewildered. A man of twenty-nine does not quite care for such an address.

"Oh, hang it all!" he said, cheerfully. "I don't think I'm to be pitied. The fact is Maude comes of a very ceremonious family, who go in for written invitations, and that sort of thing. She doesn't understand our ways."

Of course, I'm sorry she was not here to welcome you, but you must both come over some other day, and then—"

His mother interrupted him, bringing her fist down on the table with a bang. She said, determinedly,

"Never! I will never take your wife's hand in friendship, Lovel! I will never break bread with her again, until I know at least that she has repented of her folly and wickedness!"

"Mother!"

"Read that!" said Mrs. Clinton, flinging the paper across to him. "Is it a fit letter for a young married woman to receive?"

Lovel's face blanched as he read it; but though he never appreciated his wife's talents he did love her, and that tenderly. The blow had been a cruel one, and yet he rallied from it, and defended her loyally, though his heart ached cruelly the while.

"I daresay 'R. G.' is an old friend," he said, with an affected security which did not impose on Jane. "A woman has many such."

"I hope not!" said his mother, firmly.

"The world would come to a pretty pass if married women received such letters as a rule."

"I can trust Maude. She never deceived me in my life."

"Indeed! I suppose then, you know she is constantly in the habit of going to London, and always returns by one particular train?"

"You are dreaming, mother. Maude has been in London only once since we came home, and then I was with her."

"Ask the servant!"

"Reeves would be horrified if I discussed my wife with her."

"Well, she told us—or, rather, I dragged it out of her—that her mistress had been to London several times in the last month or so."

For the first time Lovel's perfect confidence was shaken. Had he not remarked the change in Maude during the last few weeks? Had he not watched the old sparkle come back to her eye, the colour return to her cheeks? He had flattered himself it meant she had bent her will to his and learned contentment in a dull, domestic life, and now?

His mother was quick to see her advantage, and pursue it—

"Wherever there is concealment there is wrong," she observed, firmly. "With a home like this, what need has your wife to be running up to London continually?"

"She may have felt lonely," hazarded Lovel.

"You know I am away a good many hours!"

"There are plenty of nice people close by who would have been glad to be friendly!"

This was Lovel's own argument, but, somehow, he did not care to listen to it from his own mother.

"There is nothing wrong in going to London," he said, sharply. "It is quite an inexpensive journey, and she spends very little on herself."

"And you are contented that she should indulge in clandestine meetings with 'R. G.'?"

"I daresay it is some old friend."

"So you suggested before! In that case, why need she make such secrecy about it? Why, if you looked, I daresay you would find half-a-dozen notes similar to that!"

They were interrupted. A latch key turned sharply in the door. A minute later and Maude herself entered, looking a little tired, certainly, but still with a strange sparkle in her eyes, and a bright, eager smile.

"I am so sorry I was late, Lovel," she said, cheerfully, "but the fog was dreadful, and—"

She stopped abruptly as she became aware of a strange change in her husband's face. It was white and drawn, as though he struggled under some terrible emotion.

Jane Trimble stood in the background, trembling, she knew not why; and on the face of Mrs. Clinton there was a cruel, mocking smile, which puzzled Maude, even more than it alarmed her.

"I am sorry I was not here to welcome you," she said, courteously, "but I had made an

engagement before I heard you were coming over.

Her hand was outstretched, but Mrs. Clinton did not seem to see it. She looked at the young wife coldly and said, frigidly:—

"Considering the nature of the engagement, I wonder you are not ashamed to mention it. We know everything. Further deceit on your part is impossible."

Maude Clinton turned to her husband—a slight touch of imperiousness in her tone. She was no patient, long-suffering Griselda, but a proud, warm-hearted woman; and that Lovel should stand there calmly while his mother insulted her cut her to the quick.

"Perhaps you will kindly explain what Mrs. Clinton means?" she said, indignantly, "if she knows herself—which I doubt."

"Insolence will not serve you," said the enraged widow, bitterly. "We have the evidence of your folly. Perhaps you will deny that this note was addressed to you?"

Maude Clinton glanced at the little slip of paper which had wrought so much mischief and understood. Again her eyes sought her husband's face; but he stood motionless, almost as though he had been turned to stone. Seeing which, Maude, with aching heart, folded the paper and put it in her pocket.

"May I ask how many more of my private letters you have amused yourself by reading, Mrs. Clinton?"

"You admit, then, it is yours?"

"Certainly!"

"Maude!" broke from Lovel Clinton at last, "for Heaven's sake, explain. There must be some terrible mistake. You, my wife, would not surely make clandestine appointments with an old lover in my absence? You could not be so unworthy!"

He spoke too late. If he had only stood by her when she first came in—if he had only defended her against his mother—she would have told him anything, everything; but he had doubted her, and she knew it.

She loved him passionately, but she was proud. She would not admit his right to condemn her unheard, and now she would punish his suspicions at any cost.

"I went to London to meet an old friend," she replied, composedly. "I made the appointment without consulting you. I have made three others before this and kept them."

"I wonder you are not afraid to confess it," said Mrs. Clinton, severely. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. If I were Lovel, you should repent bitterly of your folly."

"I know neither fear nor shame," replied Maude, quietly. "Perhaps I am too wicked to feel either; but, if anyone deserves to be ashamed, I think it is a man who, in his wife's absence, suffers two strange women to overhurl her private letters and barely slander her to him!"

"Listen to her!" said Mrs. Clinton, angrily; "she is utterly lost to all sense of wifely duty!"

But the wife of the poverty-stricken city clerk thought otherwise. Being only a poor relation, perhaps she had no right to an opinion at all; but all her sympathies were Maude's. Forgetting her timidity, she left her refuge by the fire and came up to her sister-in-law's side.

"I never slandered you, my dear, I couldn't; you looked so bright and happy always. I felt you must be good, too. My mother upset your work-table by accident. When I came back from asking your servant about the trains, she put that wretched note into my hand. I never guessed it was yours, and I had read it through before I understood. I told mother then it must be from an old friend, and that we ought both to forget we had seen it."

Maude's face softened. She took the thin worn hand in hers and said, simply:—

"Thank you, Jane!"

Lovel did not approve of this. He was expecting his wife to burst into tears, and appeal to him. Even now he did not share his

mother's suspicions. He only thought "R. G." was a scholastic acquaintance.

"I am waiting for your explanation, Maude!"

"I have none to give you!"

"Listen! We cannot go on like this. After what has happened I can never trust you again. I can never have faith in you again until you tell me the true history of your acquaintance with 'R. G.'"

"And if I refuse?"

"You dare not," put in Mrs. Clinton. "The whole world would condemn you!"

Maude Clinton took no notice of this ill-timed interruption. She turned to her husband, and, ignoring alike the presence of her taunting mother-in-law and poor weeping Jane, she spoke as though they two had been alone.

"If you had asked me differently, Lovel, I would have told you everything. Perhaps it was a mistake not to confide in you from the first, but now you have forfeited every claim. You have suffered me to be insulted in your presence without attempting to defend me! You have believed a cruel slander against me on the flimsiest evidence. Your sister, who has seen me, perhaps, three times in her life, can trust me. You, who swore to honour me till death did us part, have your mind turned against me by the faintest whisper? Heaven may forgive you, Lovel! I never can!"

She turned and left them with a firm, unflinching step. They heard her go upstairs, and presently the key turned in the lock of her bedroom door. Evidently, Mrs. Lovel Clinton did not intend her solitude to be disturbed.

That was an afternoon of storms. Instead of settling down to a comfortable high tea, Lovel had to accompany his mother and Jane to West Ledworth Station and wait there till he could put them into the Brixton train; and, as the fog was dense and the traffic slightly disorganised in consequence, all this took time.

Mrs. Clinton had thrown out a hint or two about the "spare room" at Rosemary Villa, but her son did not take them.

He had seemed to side with his mother against his wife, but he must have had some consideration for Maude since he shrank from the very idea of quartering his mother on her in the present state of things.

It was late when he returned; but a tempting meal was ready, and Mrs. Reeves, who waited on him with an unusually grave face, suggested that as her mistress was lying down with a bad headache, it would be better not to disturb her.

When the worthy servant had gone to bed Lovel went upstairs and tried the door of his wife's room.

It was still fastened, and so, unwilling to alarm Mrs. Reeves by making any noise at that time of night, he turned into his dressing room and threw himself on the sofa there.

There were plenty of rugs and shawls at his disposal, but these did not prevent his getting up the next morning feeling very stiff and cold, and—it must be confessed—with his heart decidedly hardened against Maude.

"There's no time for an explanation now," he decided, as he took his lonely breakfast. "She must be sulking, though I never thought her sullen before."

If Maude had been calm enough to judge things coolly, she would have seen that Lovel did trust her after all. The very sign of it was his going off to London without attempting to demand the explanation she had twice refused.

As a fact, poor Lovel Clinton felt utterly dazed. He would have staked his life on his wife's innocence of anything she thought to be wrong; but then Maude, with her higher education and independent girlhood, had a completely different moral standard from that of Lovel's womenkind.

She was not so bigoted or narrow-minded. Her feelings were wider, her sympathy more generous. She would have nursed a beggar girl or a repentant Magdalen had she con-

ceived it her duty; while Lovel's mother and sisters would have gathered up their skirts and passed by in silent disdain.

At eleven o'clock Maude came downstairs, looking very white and tired. In vain Mrs. Reeves pressed breakfast upon her. She said it choked her. The good woman was almost in despair, and carried off the untasted toast in mournful silence.

"Reeves," said Maude, suddenly, "I think you like me!"

"Indeed I do, ma'am!" was the prompt reply. "You see, your father and mother were main good to me. My sister was nurse-maid at the Vicarage when you were a baby, and many's the time I've held you in my arms. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, my dear young lady!"

There were tears in Maude's brown eyes as she pressed the good creature's hand.

"I am sure I can trust you. Reeves, I am going away!"

Reeves started.

"It must be that old cat yesterday who made the trouble!" she said, speaking her thoughts aloud, with terrible frankness. Then, as she recollected, "I'm sorry to speak ill of the master's mother, ma'am, but that's what she is!"

Maude did not contradict the opinion—perhaps she shared it.

"Mrs. Clinton has made my husband think I did something very wrong," said the young wife, slowly, "and I am too proud to defend myself, and so I mean to go away!"

"I wouldn't," said Reeves, feelingly. "Don't you see, ma'am, it's just like giving her her wish."

But Maude persevered in her decision. All she would promise Reeves was that before long she would send her an address at which to write to her. She left the old servant a delicate task—that of lulling the suspicion and diverting the curiosity of the people in Borted Road and other neighbours in West Ledworth.

"No one here ever liked me, Reeves," said the girl, rather plaintively, "but for your master's sake I shouldn't like them to say anything very bad of me."

"I'll take care of that, ma'am. I shall just say there's trouble at the Vicarage, and you've had to leave home all in a minute. It's too true, ma'am, for there will be trouble there when they know what's happened."

CHAPTER III.

In a very handsome house at Surbiton lived Sir Royal Glenval and his sister Dorothy. That is to say, the fine old mansion belonged to Sir Royal, and he made it his headquarters whenever he was in England; but since the death of his wife and son, some twenty years before, the Baronet had become a confirmed wanderer. Sometimes he did not spend one month out of the twelve at Surbiton. In his absence his sister ruled there with gentle sway. She was one of those sweet, motherly creatures who are found occasionally among the ranks of spinsterhood, and whose very existence ought to remove all opprobrium from the title of "old maid."

Lunch had been over some time on a certain November afternoon, but Sir Royal and his sister still lingered in the dining-room. They occupied two comfortable armchairs on either side of the great wood-fire. Miss Dorothy had her knitting. Sir Royal was expatiating on his exploits in London the day before.

"She is prettier than ever, Dolly. I almost regretted I hadn't taken your advice years ago, and adopted her."

"Well," replied his sister, cheerfully, "in that case you would have had to give her up now to Mr. Clinton, so our home would have been just as lonely; and if I remember rightly, you gave me very excellent reasons at the time for not adopting her."

"Well, I foresaw Rosemar would have a dozen children, and it didn't seem fair one should be brought up in luxury and the rest in poverty. That's all, Dolly!"

"Well, he has only ten! Did you ask Maude and her husband to come and see us?"

"No, I didn't."

"Why not?"

"Because I am quite convinced Lovel Clinton is a grudging, disagreeable fellow, who makes that poor child miserable. Oh, I don't mean he starves her or flirts with other people, but Maude is a fine character, and he can't appreciate her!"

"Did she tell you so?"

"No, she didn't," said Sir Royal, warmly. "She praised him, but she didn't look happy; and when I asked if he wouldn't be proud of her book when it came out she said a little sadly, 'Oh, he won't read it! Lovel doesn't think women can write. He says they ought to make puddings and darn stockings!'"

"Poor Maude!" said Miss Dorothy, involuntarily. "And is the book likely to be successful?"

"It's in the publisher's hands, and she's to have three hundred for it. Then they gave her an order to write a serial for one of their magazines. The little girl was delighted."

"And it is all your doing, Royal?"

"No, it isn't. Long ago she used to write pretty little sketches, and there was promise in them. When she asked me to introduce her to a publisher I told her to wait till she'd something to show him. She sent me half the story three weeks ago, and brought up the rest yesterday."

"Royal, she can't have written a story in three weeks that would fetch all that money!"

"Oh, dear, no. I fancy it was written before she married. She has only been touching it up and improving it."

"She will feel quite rich!"

"She told me she was afraid she was an expensive wife, as she had been so busy with her books—that she didn't understand much about housekeeping. That's what set me against her husband. There was something almost pathetic in a bride of three months trying to pay back the bridegroom what she cost him!"

Miss Dorothy shook her head.

"Maude Clinton always took life so earnestly. Poor little thing! Even at home she was one apart—the only one of the tribe with a love of books and learning."

Sir Royal heaved a sigh.

"Well, we must hope it'll come right by-and-by; but I wish, Dolly, you'd write her a good long letter, and let her see she has got a friend or two left that care for her. I'm off now. I promised to ride over to Wimbledon this afternoon."

He was sixty-eight, a tall, soldierly man, of good old family and large fortune. The latter was strictly entailed on a nephew whom he rarely saw.

Sir Royal would have nothing in his power to bequeath when he died except his savings, and so he had set himself long ago to put aside a provision for his sister.

It was all he did put aside, for no case of charity ever found his purse-strings closed. He was a most generous friend and a benefactor to all his poorer neighbours.

Miss Dorothy sat alone, a little troubled. She was some years younger than her brother—only fifty-five now, though her lace cap and silver hair seemed to mark her as an old lady. She had had her romance long ago. She had loved her far-off cousin, Phil Rossitur. Her father was living then, and had deemed the poor curate a bad match for his only daughter.

Phil was sent away. He could not have married on ninety pounds a year, even if Dorothy would have taken him in defiance of her father's wishes. She was twenty-four then, her lover the same age. They parted, hoping for better times.

Dorothy nursed her father through a long illness, and on his death-bed, touched by her devotion, he bade her be happy in her own way.

Alas! for Dorothy's romance. Six years had passed; she was thirty turned. The same paper which announced her father's death con-

tained the marriage of the Rev. Philip Rossitur to Myra Green.

The young curate had married his vicar's daughter, and in due time was appointed to a small country living, which was in Mr. Green's patronage, as vicar of an important town.

He and Dorothy never met again. Sir Royal, who had been abroad during the love passages between his sister and Philip, never heard of Dorothy's romance, and could not understand the great interest she took in the Rossiturs.

He and his wife—it was not long before her death—were making a driving tour in Hampshire through the New Forest, and remembering Philip's vicarage was near there, they went over one day to see Mr. and Mrs. Rossitur.

By some strange chance they arrived when the second little daughter was a month old, and needed both god-parents and a name. Sir Royal and Lady Glenval offered to "stand" for her, and by the Baronet's express wish she was christened Maude, after his wife.

When Lady Glenval died, not so long after, she remembered the brown-eyed baby, and begged her husband to try and befriend her in after life.

"Between ourselves, Dolly," said the widower, when he discussed the Rossitur *matinee*, and she suggested he should adopt little Maudie. "I wouldn't care to have much to do with Phil's wife. I daresay she was a pretty wax-doll sort of girl when he married her, but now at twenty-two she is nothing but a nurse and housekeeper. They are as poor as church mice. Still, she might sometimes try and talk of something besides her babies and her servant."

So the Glenval patronage settled on Maude. Sir Royal paid her school bills, and had her to spend the holidays at Surbiton, for even if he was away Dorothy was glad of her company. But for the fact that the whole year before Maude's marriage the Glenvals were abroad Lovel would certainly have been invited to Surbiton.

He had heard scant mention of them. The Rossiturs, as a family, were rather jealous that none of their body but Maude had even been noticed by the rich relations.

Philip Rossitur could not quite forget that Dorothy Glenval had a right to call him faithless. His wife thought the money spent on Maude would have been of more use had it passed through her own hands. Then, too, the Vicar was not devoid of pride. He did not like to confess, even to his son-in-law, that his child owed her education to the charity of a distant cousin.

Maude herself had another reason for silence. She loved Lovel passionately, but even before she was married she learned how petty and narrow were his relations. They would have pardoned everything to anyone possessing a title, and even to Maude herself they would have forgiven much had they known she was cousin to a wealthy baronet. The girl hated boasting, and so she held her tongue.

Miss Dorothy sat alone till the short day faded. She was thinking of ringing for the lamps when there came a ring at the bell, and after a short pause the butler opened the door and announced—

"Mrs. Clinton."

"Maude, my dear child!" and Dorothy's loving arms were round her in an instant, but Maude did not respond to the caress. She seemed almost to shrink from that warm embrace, and she said, wearily,—

"You must know all, please aunt, before you are kind to me. I have run away from home, and my husband thinks I am very wicked."

Dorothy Glenval stooped and kissed the poor girl tenderly.

"My dear child, don't you know I love you almost as a daughter? If all the world spoke against you, Maude, I should not believe them. Royal is just as fond of you as I am, and when he comes home he will know how to comfort you."

"Please"—Maude's voice almost broke—"please, aunt, may I tell you about it? I couldn't let Sir Royal know what they think."

Miss Dorothy listened to the story readily.

"Darling," she said, simply, when Maude stopped, "I think your mother-in-law acted cruelly. I can understand you never wishing to speak to her again, but your husband is different. If he knew nothing of your literary hopes, if he did not know that my brother was your godfather, and a man of nearly seventy—he had a right to some explanation."

"He should have had it. I would have told him everything, only he took his mother's part against me. Oh! it was wrong and unmanly to stand there and let her speak to me as though I were—wicked!"

"My poor little girl," said Miss Dorothy, quietly, "you have been hardly dealt by, but—you love your husband; and unless you are to live out your lives apart there must be some explanation. Will you let Royal go to Mr. Clinton and tell him everything?"

"I should die of shame if Sir Royal knew the cruel things they had dared to think. I love my husband dearly, but he is tired of me."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite! He is always finding fault with my opinions and habits. He would like me to spend my days gossiping with the neighbours, and never doing anything sensible."

Miss Dorothy stroked the fair head fondly.

"But you love him, Maude?" she persisted.

"I love him, but I think I almost hate his mother, and I would rather beg my bread than go home and be tyrannised over by her."

"You must stay with us, dear, for the present," decided Dorothy Glenval. "I shall send down to the station for your luggage; and to prove that you are welcome, I will tell you I was on the point of writing to ask you to pay us a visit!"

"Really!"

"Really. Your godfather fancied yesterday you were not looking very bright, and we both thought a change would do you good."

"I think you are the kindest person I ever met. Oh, Aunt Dolly, I do so wish Mrs. Clinton had been like you!"

Miss Glenval sighed.

"I suppose she is devoted to her son, and does not care for a rival in his affections!"

"It isn't that. I believe she wanted him to marry."

"What is it, then?"

Maude hesitated, and her kind friend helped her out.

"Did she think you too learned, Maude?"

"Too undomesticated," confessed Maude.

"You see, there are four sisters younger than Lovel, all unmarried; and Mrs. Clinton lost some money in a bank a few years ago, and they have been poor since—not so poor to fear debt, you know, but they have to be careful."

"And none of the girls are earning anything?"

"Oh, dear, no! that would be *infra dig*. They are waiting for husbands. Now, if only I had been different, and fond of visiting and talking, I might have had one of them on a long visit, and got up little suppers for Lovel's bachelor friends, and that sort of thing."

"I begin to understand! Mrs. Clinton hoped if her son married his wife would help off his sisters. Is that it?"

"Yes! Fancy trying to find husbands. I call it disgusting; and then to have a strange girl in the house always. It would have been horrid!"

"Dear, are you not unreasonable! Marriage is probably the only profession your sisters-in-law would succeed in. Why not give them a chance of entering on it?"

"Aunt Dorothy, I never thought you a matchmaker!"

"I am not, I hope! Only, child, if you had agreed to have one of the Misses Clinton, say, for a month's visit, and made her happy by taking her about, you would have made her and her sisters your friends for life!"

"I don't see how!"

"Because I gather you and Lovel are better off than his mother and sisters."

"I believe we are."

"And wherever there is a master of the house, it is easier to be sociable. One month with you would not have found a husband for one of the Misses Clinton; but it would have shown the family you felt kindly towards them, and made the girls careful to try and please you lest you should not give them another invitation."

"It is too late now," said Mrs. Lovel Clinton, sadly. "I have left my husband for ever, and I hope I shall never see his face again!"

After which aspiration the poor, troubled child sank back in her chair and fainted away, which was not surprising, considering all she had gone through in the last twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER IV.

That day seemed to Lovel Clinton the longest he had ever spent. Though, unhappily, quarrels had not been rare in his brief married life, he had never before gone to his office without even a sight of his wife.

He thought the clock would never strike the hour that was to set him free; and though, when at last the moment came, and he was fairly on his way to Ludgate Hill Station—he felt an untold relief that he should soon be at home—he yet shrank from the thought of the explanation before him.

He wanted to see Maudie, and assure her that he believed in her fully, and had never doubted her.

He wanted to "make it up and be friends," as children say, and yet he could not forget his mother's slanders. Try as he would to banish all thought of that miserable little note it would haunt him.

He was master of his own house; he had a right to be consulted in all things. His wife had acted very wrongly in meeting anyone without his knowledge, much more a Bohemian who passed under the alias of "R. G."

He told himself all this, and felt aggrieved; but then, on the other hand, Maudie was his one love, and he knew perfectly his life would have been a dull affair without her; so that his feelings, as he opened the gate of Rosemary Villa, were more than a little "mixed."

To-day he had not forgotten his latchkey, so he admitted himself without needing to summon Mrs. Reeves.

He went straight to the dining-room. The fire burnt cheerfully, the table was spread for the evening meal; but a pang seized him as he noticed the cloth was only "laid" for one.

"She can't mean to shut herself up in her own room always," he thought, bewildered. "It would be much better to have a good talk, and get it over."

Enter Mrs. Reeves, a little stiffer than usual, but still the perfection of an old trusted servant. Perhaps her heart quaked as much as her master's, for she knew what he had yet to learn.

"Where's your mistress?" demanded Mr. Clinton. "Isn't her headache better?"

"Mrs. Clinton has gone away, sir!" said Reeves, thinking it better to make a sudden plunge, and jerk out the unhappy truth. "She left a letter for you, and told me if any one inquired I was to say there was trouble at the Vicarage."

Lovel stretched out his hand for the letter almost like a blind man.

Reeves stood waiting; she really was afraid to leave him there alone.

And this is what he read:—

"I never wronged you in thought or deed. I know I was not an economical wife, and I wanted to earn money for you if I could not help to save it. 'R. G.' had promised to show me how. Ask my father about him if you like. He is an old man not far from seventy, and I think he loved me almost as a grandchild, because I was called after his wife."

"Your mother will be quite happy now, for you are quite free from the 'wicked woman

who spoils your life'—you see I remember her exact words. When I saw you stand by and listen to them without one effort to defend me, I think my heart broke. You will never be troubled by me again—you are quite free. Reeves is a good woman, and will know how to silence all curious questions if you trust to her."

"M. C."

Lovel turned on the servant with a white, angry face.

"Is it true? Did you know she meant to leave me?"

Reeves nodded.

"I did, sir. And seeing the poor young lady could do nothing that pleased you, I don't think anyone could blame her."

Lovel Clinton stared in speechless surprise.

"She is my wife!" he said, doggedly. "Her place was here!"

"She was your wife, sir," said Reeves, quickly, "but she wasn't made to be your slave. People think a deal of what a wife owes her husband, but they never seem to look on the other side. A woman gives up a good deal when she marries, and Miss Maudie had more to give up than most. She was as happy as a bird when she taught at the High School. Everyone thought her a bright, high-spirited girl. She made friends everywhere, but since she came here not one of those friends has ever been invited to the house, and the folks who do come never thought of anything but picking holes in her, because she wasn't made to their pattern."

Poor Lovel let himself be lectured without an attempt at remonstrance; he really was too overcome.

"I've seen a good deal of the world, sir," went on Reeves, who saw her advantage and used it, "but I never met a lady who thought less of herself and more of her husband than did Mrs. Clinton. As to the folks about here—they weren't worthy to tie her shoes. To begin with, the Rossiturs come of a high family. Sir, even if they're poor, it's not one of them would come into a lady's house and ransack her private places while she's away!"

Lovel winced. He sat down to his tea, but he felt no appetite for it. He was haunted by a strange fear. Where was his wife?

"As Mrs. Clinton told you so much," he said, bitterly, "I daresay she confided to you something more—namely, the place she was going to!"

"Mrs. Clinton never confided in me, sir. I have eyes, and I couldn't help seeing she was miserable. I've ears, and these walls are thin, so that I couldn't help hearing what your mother said yesterday, and, if I may speak the truth, I'd have dearly loved to show her to the door!"

"I wonder if she's gone to the High School?" said Lovel, meaning his wife, and speaking aloud in his dismay.

"Hardly, sir, considering it's but a mile off, and she wished the West Ledworth folk to think she had gone to her father!"

Lovel tried to eat. Reeves still lingered. At last she got out what was on her mind.

"I've been very comfortable here, sir, and you've behaved very kindly to me; but, no offence, I'd rather leave this very night and lose every penny of my wages than stay here if your mother's to be mistress. I should always be thinking of the poor, dear young lady whom she's driven away."

"Be easy, Reeves," replied the young man, gravely. "There will never be another mistress here until my wife returns."

It was rather an aggravation of Lovel's misery that the very next evening the Rev. Philip Rossitur should appear. He had written to his daughter announcing he was coming to London and should be glad to sleep at the house. The letter, arriving after Maudie had left, was unopened, and the vicar's coming was utterly unexpected.

Lovel Clinton was forced to come to a hasty decision—silence or confession—and he chose the latter. He made a clean breast of every-

thing to his father-in-law and met with, on the whole, kinder treatment than he deserved.

"Maudie will come back," said the Vicar, simply. "If ever woman loved her husband she loved you, and when once you tell her you were mistaken and ask her forgiveness for doubting her, she will return. She has the largest heart, the finest character of all my children; and, though your married life has so soon grown shadowed, I am sure all will come right."

"You forget," said Lovel, bitterly. "I have not the slightest clue where she is! How am I to tell her what you say when she has carefully hidden herself from me?"

Mr. Rossitur looked grave.

"If ever I hear from her I will tell you; but, of all places in the world, she is least likely to come home to us. My wife is a good woman, but narrow-minded. She has never understood Maudie. I cannot be as indignant as I feel at your mother's cruel judgment of my child, since I know my own wife's would have been as harsh."

"Do you think if I sought out this old man—this 'R. G.'—he could tell me anything?"

"I saw him myself to-day," said the Vicar, thoughtfully. "He asked if I had heard from Maudie lately, and said when he met her in London on Tuesday he thought she looked ill."

"It was Wednesday she left home."

"Well, he spoke of meeting her on the Tuesday. Maudie was always his favourite in our family. She was his godchild, and, besides paying all the expenses of her education, he was always making her presents."

"Then he wasn't poor?"

"Poor!" The Vicar almost laughed, in spite of his anxiety. "My dear fellow, Sir Royal Glenval is one of the richest baronets in England! All his property is entailed, but he has a splendid income while he lives."

"Sir Royal Glenval! Of course, I have often heard of him, but I had no idea you knew him."

"As a boy, I spent all my holidays at his father's house. My mother was his first cousin, which, I suppose, makes me and Royal kinsmen, though remote ones. He is the only relation I possess in the world; but I am not fond of boasting of him, and the subject is a sore one with my wife. She always thinks if he had started one of the boys in life, instead of spending so much on Maudie, it would have been better."

"Then you are sure Maudie is not with him?" asked Lovel. "You don't think she went to his house and claimed his wife's protection?"

"His wife has been dead these twenty years. No, I am certain my daughter is not with him. He distinctly said he had not seen her since Tuesday. I only wish it had been otherwise."

"But what am I to do?"

That question proved hard to answer. Mr. Rossitur went back to the country with it still unsolved.

Lovel advertised in the agony column of the chief London papers. He spent many sovereigns before, on Christmas morning, a few lines reached him, traced in a faint, tremulous hand.

"I have been very ill, but am better now. Please give up looking for me. You know I was always a trouble to you, and you doubted me. So we are best apart."

There was no hiding something of the truth from Mrs. Clinton, senior. After her ill-omened visit to Rosemary Villa she sent three long letters to her son, demanding if his wife had "repented," and then, finding these unanswered, she presented herself at West Ledworth at an hour when she knew he would be at home.

Mrs. Reeves opened the door and ushered her into the dining-room, where Lovel sat reading the newspaper. This was before Maudie's brief note had reached Rosemary Villa, and he was still in ignorance of his wife's fate.

What he said to his mother was never

known; but Mrs. Clinton had no reason to congratulate herself on the interview.

At first, hearing Maude had flown, the widow thought of the victory won, and, in fancy, saw herself and one or two of those unmarried daughters very comfortably domiciled at Rosemary Villa, but she was very soon to be undeceived.

"Of course, we will not forsake you in your trouble, Lovel. I am leaving Jane, to-morrow, and I will come at once to take charge of your house. That woman, Reeves, had better go. She was always a far more expensive servant than you could afford!"

"Thank you. I have not the slightest intention of parting with Mrs. Reeves," said Lovel, coldly, "and while she is here no other housekeeper is required!"

"But, my dear boy, think of your loneliness!"

"I would rather be alone, mother, than see you ruling in my wife's home. I shall never forgive myself for suffering you to speak to her as you did. It is your doing, and yours alone, that my life is blighted and my home desolate!"

"Oh!" No words will convey the volume of meaning the widow put in that "oh!"

"Oh! then you approve of private meetings with mysterious strangers?"

"I approve of Maude meeting her godfather, her father's cousin, an old man well-nigh seventy, who all his life has been showering benefits upon her. A man of Sir Royal Glenval's known worth and character would honour any young girl by his kindly notice."

"Sir Royal Glenval—the man who gave twenty thousand pounds to the Westford Infirmary! Why, he is a baronet!"

"Precisely, and Maude's godfather. Mr. Rossitur was with me the other night, and he told me of the warm friendship between him and Sir Royal. Indeed, they are related. The late Mrs. Rossitur was a Miss Glenval."

"But—"

"But you did not know it," said Lovel, bitterly. "You thought I had thrown myself away upon the child of a poverty-stricken parson. Those were your very words. Well, you see, mother, real gentlefolks don't boast of their connections. I don't suppose it ever entered into Mr. Rossitur's head that you would appreciate his daughter any more because she was third cousin to a baronet."

Mrs. Clinton, senior, retired decidedly worsted in the conflict. She relieved the long-suffering Jane of her presence, and went home the very next day, and there was great rejoicing among the little Trimbles, to whom "grand-mamma" was anything but a welcome guest.

CHAPTER V., AND LAST.

When people are very poor, and have no hope of even a stray pound of capital to start in any undertaking, they mostly turn their thoughts to letting lodgings. Probably, poor things, if they belong to the class who have known "better days" they yet possess some tidy furniture, and by squeezing themselves into the back of the house, they can contrive to make two front rooms fairly presentable for the desired tenants.

Such a crisis had come in Jane Trimble's life. There was not the smallest chance of her husband's salary increasing, while each year the children's demands, both for food and clothes, grew at the most alarming rate.

If she sent away the little servant, who did so much hard work for the weekly wage of eightpence and her "keep," she would have had to put out the washing. So after many an anxious thought, she told her husband she thought they had better let lodgings.

John Trimble shook his head—a meek, quiet man by nature. A long course of failure and disappointment had made him inclined to look at the black side of everything.

"Who would come to lodge here, Jenny?" he asked, disparagingly.

"Lots of people in this road do let lodg-

ings!" persisted Jane, who could not bear cold water thrown on her cherished plan.

"But they haven't six children," said Mr. Trimble, grimly. "Don't look like that, my dear," as a shadow flitted over his wife's thin face. "The youngsters are, everyone of them, dear to us. But I mean with all the town before them a stranger would hardly care to take lodgings in a house with six children under ten."

"Well, it will cost nothing to try. I wonder how much I ought to ask?"

"Ten shillings a week," suggested John. "Not a penny more. Jenny, my dear, a lodger would be a double benefit, for with the front rooms disposed of we simply couldn't take in your mother when she comes to town. She would see that herself."

Jane Trimble blushed. The pain her mother's visitations were to her no tongue could tell; for Mrs. Clinton expected the best bedroom, the warmest seat at the table, and delicacies such as the family never dreamed of for themselves; nor did she offer any compensation, not so much as a pair of socks for the baby or a ribbon for her daughter.

A month at Brixton, whenever she wished to be in London, seemed to her a graceful way of suffering the Trimbles to pay back a small portion of the debt they owed her (according to her views John was responsible for the money she had lost by the failure of his father's bank).

Well, a neat card was bought and placed in the front window. For the first three days Jane Trimble's heart beat with hope whenever a double knock came at the door. When a week passed she was less sanguine, and by the time the card had been up a month she had quite gone over to her husband's view.

But John Trimble was not destined to be right. Before January was over Jane's eldest born, a bright little maid of nine, came running upstairs with the tidings that a lady was in the parlour, and wanted to know about the rooms.

"A lady!" Mrs. Trimble's thoughts had been on City gentlemen. "I am afraid they won't suit her. What is she like, Mabel?"

"She is not like grandmother," said the little girl, cheerfully, "she speaks so gently. She is nursing little Dot in the big armchair."

It was quite true. Jane found her youngest but one in the visitor's lap, stroking her little head against a soft sealskin coat, and saying "Pretty, pretty!"

The mother gave her to Mabel to lead away, and then, when she closed the door on them both, turned back to greet—her sister-in-law!

"Maude! Oh, my dear, I am so glad to see you!"

There was a choked sob in Maude's voice as she answered.

"Oh, Jane, how is Lovel?"

"I think he is well," said Mrs. Trimble, gravely. "Mamma wanted to go and live with him, but he wouldn't have her. It is given out that Ledworth is too bleak for you, and you are spending the winter with your own family; but oh, my dear! won't you go back to him? His heart must be sore for want of you; and you—you look only the shadow of the pretty bride he brought home so proudly last August."

"I shall never go back to him!"

"But, my dear—"

"Listen, Jane! I went straight to my godfather's, and I was very ill. For weeks I could not move or speak. The doctor said it was brain fever. Then Sir Royal and his sister were going to France till the spring, and they wanted to take me too, only somehow I could not bear to go. I shall never see Lovel's face again; and yet I couldn't bear to feel the sea divided us."

Jane kissed her. It was not a very logical reply, but it soothed poor Maude as nothing else could have done.

"And what did you do, dear?"

"Oh! I am earning my own living. I write for one of the magazines, and they pay me

more than I need, and I have a little store in the bank besides. My godfather wanted to make me an allowance, but it seemed a slight to Lovel, and so I wouldn't have it."

"And where are you living, dear?"

"In lodgings in the Brixton Road; but it is, oh, so lonely; and to-day, when I saw the card in your window, Jane, I hoped—"

And the arrangement thus dimly hinted at came about. Neither Mr. Trimble nor his children had ever seen Lovel Clinton's wife, and the visits of the elder Mrs. Clinton and her daughters must perforce cease when Jane had a lodger.

To the hard-working, careworn mother the certainty of a weekly income was an untold boon; but Jane had another motive, too.

She saw that Maude was ill and suffering, lonely and unhappy. She could not bear the thought of her staying in dreary lodgings, where no one knew even her name; but she made one stipulation—she must tell the whole truth to John before Maude became their inmate.

"He will never consent!"

"I think he will. He has known so much sorrow himself, he always likes people in trouble. I will tell him to-night."

John looked thoughtful, but at last he decided as his wife wished.

"If we were rich I should see no harm in asking her on a visit, so it can't be wrong to take her as a lodger. It would be paying your brother a poor compliment to shut our doors against her just because she is his wife; only, Jenny, I'm afraid you'll find a helpless, fine lady—rather a handful."

This opinion he rescinded in three days.

Maude Clinton—Mrs. Glen, as she was called by children and servant—proved quite a help to the tired, overworked mother. In the morning she was always shut up with her writing, but from the one o'clock dinner till bedtime she was at the service of the whole house. The charming dolls' frocks she manufactured out of almost nothing, the little pile of neatly folded garments she used to restore carefully repaired to Mrs. Trimble's big mending basket, were but a trifle in the long list of little kindnesses she was always offering.

"If only Lovel could see her now," said Jane, half tearfully, to her husband one spring evening, "he must forgive her!"

"My dear girl, there was nothing to forgive. That is the hardest part of it. There is no real injury on either side; they did not understand each other, and so they drifted apart. Your mother's interference brought things to a crisis, and they separated. I believe myself, if they could only meet all would be well. One can see that poor girl is fretting her heart out for her husband, and when I met Lovel one day last week in the city I thought he looked ten years older. There is nothing but pride keeps them apart. He cannot come to her because he does not know where she is, and she will not be the one to make the first advance."

Jane looked bewildered.

"I suppose it would not do for me to write to him?" she suggested.

"That would be betraying her confidence! No! Unless some strange chance brings about a meeting, I fear this miserable estrangement will last their lives, and they will both go lonely to their graves."

"I don't think Maude will be alone much longer," said Mrs. Trimble, gravely; "at least, I hope not. John, don't you understand?"

Mr. Trimble looked hopelessly puzzled, and his wife went on.

"I think that is why she is so fond of our children. It will be in June, John, and I am sure I feel almost distracted. It seems positively wicked not to let Lovel know; and yet, if I sent for him, I am pretty sure Maude would go away and hide herself, even from us!"

"You mustn't send," said John, decidedly. "Maybe the baby will bring matters right. She'll surely see she can't make her child fatherless to satisfy her pride."

"John, don't be hard on her!"

"I don't mean to be, Jane. There are faults on both sides; because they had no troubles, your brother and his wife set out to make them. They're just a foolish young couple, my dear, but maybe things will come right in the end."

They were to come right in a way Jane Trimble little breathed of. When the June roses bloomed, making even the tiny back garden at Brixton look bright and summery, Lovel Clinton's child was born.

It was a fine healthy boy, and caused no shadow of anxiety; but before three days had passed the doctors shook their heads over its mother.

A physician had been called in to consult with the ordinary practitioner, and he spoke very plainly to Mrs. Trimble.

"There is something on her mind. She has no strength to rally, just because she has no wish to live. Even now at the eleventh hour you might save her if you could give her peace."

John was out. Poor Mrs. Trimble had no one to consult with, and she was fairly at her wits' end. How could she leave Maude, perhaps to die in her absence? Yet, how could she let Lovel learn the bad news from a stranger. But Maude was unconscious, and did not know her, so Mrs. Trimble confided the baby and his mother to the nurse, put on her well-worn bonnet, and set out for West Ledworth.

She got there at seven o'clock. It was a strange contrast to the last time she had stood at that familiar station. The November fog had given place to June sunshine, but it seemed to Jane there would be no brightness left in the world for her brother when he knew her errand.

She took a cab at the station. It was no time to study petty economies, and was driven quickly to Rosemary Villa. Mrs. Reeves opened the door. Something in Jane's face seemed to tell her the truth.

"My mistress is dead, and you have come to tell us," said the poor woman.

"Not dead," corrected Jane, gently, "but very, very ill. Where is my brother?"

He came out while they were speaking, took his seat in the cab in utter silence, while Mrs. Reeves quietly turned the key in the door, abandoned Rosemary Villa to its fate and mounted the box beside the driver, first dropping a kind of apology to Mrs. Trimble.

"I'm used to sick folks, ma'am, and can turn my hand to anything."

The journey was in perfect silence, only when they got out at Brixton Station Lovel asked, hoarsely:—

"Where did you find her?"

"She has been living with us for the last five months."

"And you never told me?"

"I wanted to, Lovel; but it seemed cruel to drive her from a home where she was loved and cared for."

"But when she was ill?"

"She has only been ill three days," explained Jane. "We always hoped she would send for you when the baby came, but we could not betray her confidence."

"The baby?"

"Your son and heir!" said Jane, trying hard to speak cheerfully. "He only came on Monday!"

She pointed to the door of Maude's room, and he went in alone. Nurse and doctor retreated when they saw him, perceiving it was the husband and father come, and, as they believed, too late. There was no witness present when Lovel met his wife again.

They had thought her sleeping, and feared she would never wake again, but that strange, deep slumber would pass into the sleep of death.

Lovel has a wondrous power, though, and as Lovel spoke her name the brown eyes opened slowly, and her voice said, faintly:—

"I thought you would come. I felt I couldn't go away without saying good-bye!"

"Not good-bye, my darling," pleaded Lovel. "Oh! if you knew how I have wanted you all these weary months!"

"And I you," she whispered.

"It was all a mistake," said the poor fellow, sadly. "I loved you always, Maude. I never doubted you, only you were so different from any woman I had ever seen, and I could not understand."

"I was wrong, too," confessed his wife. "If you were afraid of learned women and blue-stockings, I despised all the old-fashioned housewives. I wanted so much to show my way was best—and I failed."

"You must make haste and get well," he told her, fondly, "and then I shall be proud of my wife. I know now, my darling, why you went to London so often, and what was the secret between you and Sir Royal, and how bravely my little wife meant to help me!"

"They said I was extravagant, and I wanted so much to prove I meant to be a good wife. Oh! Lovel, if only the time could come over again!"

"It will," said Lovel, hopefully. "We will begin afresh, Maude, and you will see things will be all changed."

She shook her head.

"It's too late now. I'm dying, and you've only come to say good-bye. But, Lovel, I'd like to stay with you."

"Dying!"

Well, they all thought so. The doctor left the house in the belief no more skill of his could avail the poor young wife. The nurse and Mrs. Reeves, as they watched over the unconscious baby, believed by morning he would be motherless.

Only Jane Trimble, with her simple faith, argued Heaven could not take Maude when her happiness had but just begun.

Lovel and his sister watched by the invalid all that night, and in the morning Jane's hopes were fulfilled. The doctor admitted there was a "slight improvement. After all, his patient might pull through."

This second verdict proved the right one; for now, at the time of writing, Lovel the second is a handsome boy of four years' old, and his mother is the picture of health and happiness, the joy of her husband's life, and the sunshine of his home.

But that home is no longer Rosemary Villa. Lovel had taken the little house only for a year, and when his wife began to recover he could read in her eyes a great dread of returning to the place where she had suffered so much.

So, without saying a word to her, he decided to inform his landlord he should not renew the tenancy; and while Maude and the wonderful baby were delighting Miss Dorothy's heart by a long visit at Surbiton, Lovel found a bijou villa at Wimbledon, and, with Mrs. Reeves' able co-operation, removed his household goods there.

Sir Royal, who loved his godchild tenderly, considered her debts his, in proof of which, very soon after the Clintons settled at Wimbledon, he found a situation for John Trimble far superior to anything the poor fellow had ever hoped for of late years; and Jane, who had a warm affection for her sister-in-law and the baby born in her house, took advantage of her new prosperity to move to Wimbledon and settle near her brother.

For some years there was a decided coolness between Lovel Clinton and his mother; but when Maude's second child was born and proved to be a little girl, happy in her husband's love, certain that he was well contented with her, the young wife held out the olive branch and Mrs. Clinton, senior, was invited to the christening of her son's first daughter.

And so the clouds rolled away. Lovel learned that women's intellect may add substantially to their husband's income.

In time the Clintons, as a family, grew rather proud of Maude's talents and liked to talk of her books and the handsome sum they brought in.

But through all those years Maude has never once revisited West Ledworth. She cannot bear to think of the misery she suffered there when she and Lovel were only A FOOLISH YOUNG COUPLE!

[THE END.]

Society

A CONNECTED narrative of the Ophir's recent tour to the Colonies would be welcome throughout the whole British Empire, and there is every likelihood that such a narrative will be published. The King is said to favour the idea. If it is carried out the Prince and Princess of Wales will not only contribute to the letter-press, but supply many of the illustrations from photographs either taken by themselves or at their desire. Two separate editions of the proposed record are talked about, one at a popular price that will place it within the reach of all and another of an expensive kind, such as numbers of people would like to preserve as a small souvenir of an historic tour.

EVER since the King's accession, it has been evident that the Heir-Apparent could not remain much longer in the somewhat insignificant town residence assigned to him at York House. Now that he and his consort have received the title of Prince and Princess of Wales, it has been definitely arranged that their Royal Highnesses are to take possession of Marlborough House. Attached though the King is to the place, His Majesty has decided to vacate it in favour of the Prince and make Buckingham Palace his town house for the future. The change will be made before the Coronation, by which time, of course, the alterations at the Palace will be completed.

It will be some time before the King and Queen will be able to make Buckingham Palace their home in London, because the alterations there are on a very extensive scale. Not only are preparations being made for the King and Queen, but a suite of rooms has been set apart for the use of the Princess Victoria, and these are now being decorated under her own supervision. Needless to say that the King and Queen are also taking a warm personal interest in the new schemes of decoration and lighting, some idea of the extent of which may be gained from the fact that the installation of electric light alone will cost £8,000.

WITH the interest now shown in the Koh-i-Noor, in view of its possible appearance in the Queen's crown, there are many misstatements made regarding this world-famed jewel, chief of which is that it is the largest diamond in the world. In reality, it occupies fifth position. The Empress of Russia is believed to be the possessor of the largest, the one known as the Orloff diamond. The Florentine diamond of the Emperor of Austria is also larger than the Koh-i-Noor. Further, the Orleans diamond and the Star of the South (found in Brazil) are generally acknowledged to come before the British gem.

THE present matrimonial differences between the Grand Duke and Duchess of Hesse—who are first cousins, both being grandchildren of Queen Victoria—recall the circumstances which led to the divorce of His Highness's own father, the widowed husband of our own Princess Alice, from his second wife. This was Madame de Kolemene, whom he made bold to marry secretly on the very night of the wedding of his eldest daughter, Princess Victoria, to Prince Louis of Battenberg, in his own palace, and with his mother-in-law, the Queen of England, under his roof. The secret was not long kept, and the scandal waxed to such dimensions that at last the Grand Duke applied for a divorce. He was influenced in this course by the representations of his English mother-in-law, who hastily quitted Darmstadt on hearing of the insult which had been offered her.

KENNETH'S CHOICE

By Florence Hodgkinson

(Author of "Dolly's Legacy," "Ivy's Peril," "Guy Forrester's Secret," &c., &c.)

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

In the prologue we are told how Andrew Gordon came to be arrested for the suspected murder of his old master, Mr. Trevlyn, of Trevlyn and Marks, and that the sudden shock caused his death the same night that he was arrested. Andrew Gordon was living in the East End of London at the time, and a few days before his arrest had taken as lodger Margaret Lyon, with her child. It so happened that Andrew recognised Margaret as having called upon Mr. Trevlyn. Both women have lost their husbands, and each is left with a young child.

Twenty years have gone by, and Lord Combermere, conscious of his approaching end, has named Kenneth St. Clune (who succeeds to the title) heir to the vast estate of Combermere on condition that he marries on or before her twenty-first birthday, Margaret Helena, only child of Noel St. Clune.

Kenneth has no intention of allowing himself to be coerced into marrying a woman he has never seen, and determines to remain poor but free. The terms of the will and Kenneth's decision are considered by Miss Dean sufficient reason for breaking her engagement to Kenneth. Miss Dean places wealth and all it can command before the love of an honest but poor nobleman.

Noel Marsh, one of a poor but proud family, determines to try and earn her own living, and makes the acquaintance of Bruce Carey, an artist at the top of his profession, who offers her employment as an artist's model. Nell's sister, Quentin, has become secretly betrothed to Austin Brooks, but it was her ambition and not love really decided the matter.

CHAPTER VI.

It may seem strange, but the young Earl of Combermere never once reflected that Kathleen Dean's departure left him free to carry out the conditions of his cousin Geoffrey's will, and to become, if it so pleased him, master of the Abbey by wedding Miss St. Clune.

Kenneth never once thought of this. He had given his first passionate love to Kathleen. The young Earl had led a retired and somewhat lonely life; perhaps, from a fear of their resembling his mother, he had rather shunned young ladies, and until he took those chambers in the Temple and plunged into society, he had never seen a single girl to whom he had given a second thought. No idle flirtation and flimsy attachments had ever occupied Kenneth's heart. It was the treasure of a love never before offered to woman, of a heart whose beats had never quickened for any woman than herself, that he offered for the acceptance of Kathleen Dean.

And she spurned it!

When he left the house in Mandesley Gardens there was but one alleviation of Kenneth's misery—the girl had been allowed to give him her own answer. In the dreary future he would not need to torture himself with fancying how far the reply meted out to him was Kathleen's own wish, and how far mute obedience to her mother. He had had proof positive Mrs. Dean had left her daughter free. Kathleen, with her own lips, had told him she was only a butterfly; as she had said, sacrifice was not in her nature.

But the young man thought bitterly, as he drove away, to share his lot *ought* not to have been a sacrifice if she loved him—two years of waiting in a pretty easeful home, and then a life, if not replete with grandeur, yet provided with ample comforts.

"Women are selfish to the very core!" decided the disappointed Earl. "She might well call herself a butterfly. Poor pretty child, she is only made to be a toy or plaything; she is not of the stuff to meet adversity. Better for us both this blow has fallen before she had cast in her lot with mine. Had she been my wife and any change of fortune made me a poor man, if I had looked into her eyes and seen she regretted our union, I should have been ready to kill myself. Poor Aunt Lucy! She believed Katy would only cling the closer to me in this trouble; and she was full of plans for making the time of waiting pass pleasantly to her. What will she say, I wonder? Poor Aunt Lucy! her ideas of womanhood would

seem quite antiquated, I suppose, to Kathleen and Mrs. Dean."

By this time he was at Mr. Ashwin's, and was without difficulty admitted to that gentleman's private room. The old gentleman saw at once something had happened. He had not shared Lady Combermere's rosy visions, and without a word from Kenneth he felt convinced the young Earl stood before him a jilted man. But he possessed a quality very rare in men—fact. He never touched on Lord Combermere's love affairs, but went directly to the business he supposed brought him to the office.

"I hope I was right, my lord, and that Mrs. Marks was able to assist us."

"You were right and wrong at the same time, Mr. Ashwin; but it seems she had only a slight acquaintance with her."

Mr. Ashwin shook his head.

"That won't help us. It would hardly continue after the marriage, which must have been some time in 1861; and from St. Clune's last letter to his father we can trace his widow's whereabouts to the spring of sixty-two."

"Have you been to the address given in that letter?" asked Kenneth.

"Yes. Oddly enough, the same people are still in the house; they remembered the young couple perfectly. They lived there from the time of the wedding to a few months after Noel went to India, when Mrs. St. Clune told the landlady she feared an enemy, who would do his best to work her ruin, had discovered her address, and therefore she must move. She took her baby and her few articles of property, and went that very day. She parted quite cordially with the people of the house, and promised to come and see them when the danger was over, but they have never heard any trace of her since."

"And that was—?"

"July, 1862."

"Then my mother's information is of use, though Heaven knows, Ashwin, I feel ashamed enough of having to tell it. It seems that a little while after her husband's death she purchased some old black lace and handsome jet ornaments of Miss Trevlyn (she knew her only by name), and with a caution which I despise, insisted on having the poor lady's address, so that if either bargain turned out ill she might demand a part of the price to be returned. Don't you think I have cause to be proud of my mother, Ashwin?"

"In this case her curiosity may be of use to us. Even if the transaction took place only a week after Mr. Marks's murder (which is most unlikely) it would give us information of Mrs. St. Clune two months after she left Streatham Hill."

"Well, I have the address, but I should doubt anyone staying there eighteen years. I have passed down the street myself, and even called on people who were staying there, but it is essentially a lodging-house locality—very respectable, no one need be ashamed of having friends there; but the population is almost solely migratory. People take apartments there while their house is painted, or while they are in town to see a doctor. I never yet met anyone who 'lived' in Nethererton Street."

Mr. Ashwin started.

"Nethererton Street! How strange! The most extraordinary suspicion has come into my head. If only I am right Miss St. Clune can be found to-morrow."

"My dear sir, I can't imagine what you mean. There are quite fifty houses in Nethererton Street. I have not even told you the number yet!"

"It was seven!"

"How could you guess it?"

"Listen. When poor Gordon died whilst under suspicion of murdering your stepfather, there was a lodger living with his wife. When I got the widow away from the East-end

suburb, where her history was in everyone's mouth, I took lodgings for her at 7, Nethererton Street, Chelsea, or, as they call it now, Fulham Road, and the lodger, with her baby, accompanied her."

"And you think she was Mrs. St. Clune?" demanded Combermere.

"I do. I never saw her, often as I was there. At first she would never meet me. When Mrs. Gordon was laid low with fever she devoted herself to her, and when I called always sent the woman of the house to receive me. I remember her marked diffidence rather puzzled me at the time. Of course, as Mrs. Clune, she knew I was the Earl of Combermere's family lawyer."

"And she died?"

"She caught a sharp attack of low fever—I don't mean caught it from Mrs. Gordon, whose illness was not infectious; it was just the outcome of anxiety and over-work. She seemed to be better, and the landlady had taken in the newspaper to amuse her. When Mrs. Gordon went she found her dead on the floor."

"I begin to see light. She read in that paper the announcement of poor Noel's death, and the blow was too much for her!"

"Something of the kind. The very name she bore—Mrs. Lyon—goes to prove our theory, for it is the English version of Leon, which everyone knows was his mother's favourite name for Noel St. Clune."

"It seems clear as day!"

"I wonder if she confided in Mrs. Gordon?"

"Not entirely. I know she left papers and letters in her care, also a few ornaments for the child when she grew up. She gave her all the money she had—I think it was fifty pounds—and begged of her to keep the child until she was claimed by her father's family. I told Mrs. Gordon she had far better send the baby to the workhouse."

"You didn't mean it, Ashwin?"

"Perhaps not. Well, she wouldn't hear of it. When she went down to the little cottage I had furnished for her she took the two children, and from that day to this they have passed as her daughters."

"Have you ever seen her since?"

"Never. After I became sure of her husband's innocence I kept away purposely, lest I should say anything to arouse false hopes. She writes to me sometimes. At her wish I gave my address to the landlady in Nethererton Street, and directed her, if anyone made inquiries about the little Margaret, to send them to me. It would have been strange if I had been the person to make the inquiries myself!"

"Very strange!"

"In her last letter Mrs. Gordon said the two girls were growing up, and she was very anxious about their future. She still held the papers Mrs. Lyon had given to her care, but she thought it would be far better not to say anything on the subject to her adopted child. She would rather go on keeping the secret of the adoption until her death."

"She must be a generous creature."

"She has suffered terribly. She loved her husband passionately—but she believed in his guilt."

"How strange!"

"The idea of an atonement has pursued her ever since. I believe she took her motherless child solely for that reason. She is much loved in Marden. She is devoted to the poor, and once nursed a dying outcast back to health. Poor woman, it is a kind of mania with her that she must go on heaping up good works and sacrifices in the hope that at the last they may blot out her husband's sin."

"Poor thing! It must be a monomania."

"It haunts her perpetually—and she has another trouble. She is devoted to her children (she always speaks of Margaret as hers), and the fear of their ever learning the true story of her husband's death is a kind of nightmare to her. She is a very simple woman and yet she has a keen sense of honour. Of course, the greatest chance of hiding it from



"PROMISE ME ONE THING: YOU WILL HAVE LEFT MARDEN BEFORE AUSTIN BROOKS COMES HOME," SAID QUEENIE, THE LAST NIGHT SHE AND NELL WERE TOGETHER.

the girls would be if they were to marry early; but she has the greatest dread of such a thing. She says she would be bound to tell the truth about her husband to anyone who sought to marry his child. The only two contingencies which would make her reveal the facts of Margaret's parentage would be in the case of her own approaching death, or any slight falling on the girl from her being thought Andrew Gordon's daughter.

"I can understand her fears. Of course, once tell Miss St. Clune the story of her mother's acquaintance with her present guardian, and she must also, of necessity, learn also that that same guardian is Andrew Gordon's widow."

"Well, we must manage that. It would be hard if the poor thing's secret were revealed, and the truth proclaimed that her child is a murderer's daughter, just through her having provided a home for your cousin all these years."

"You feel convinced, then, that the girl passing as her daughter is my cousin?"

"Aren't you?"

"Almost."

"The papers in Mrs. Marsh's care (did I tell you she called herself Marsh?) will set all doubts at rest. Lord Combermere, your mother's economy will be the means of restoring Miss St. Clune to her rights."

"What is she like?"

Mr. Ashwin smiled.

"My lord, is it possible I can tell? The two children were mere babies when I lost sight of them—little more than a year old. I almost fancy Miss St. Clune was the elder of the two. They were both pretty little things—one dark the other fair. I suppose the dark child is your cousin, since Mr. and Mrs. Gordon were very fair."

"It seems to me our next step must be to

go down to Marden. We can do nothing until we have seen Mrs. Marsh."

"I am quite of your opinion. It is rather late to-day. Would to-morrow suit you?"

"Admirably. What time?"

"A train leaves Victoria at two."

"I will meet you there. Shall you write to warn the widow of your coming?"

"I think not. A visit would alarm her less than a letter announcing it. Of course, Lord Combermere, you will never let the poor thing suspect you know her true name and pitiful story?"

"Of course not."

"I shall be glad for you to see your cousin and form your own opinion of her before she knows the somewhat embarrassing conditions of her grandfather's will."

Kenneth looked up quickly.

"Is there any need for her to know of them as all?"

"Lord Combermere!"

"I see no need to tell her that by marrying her I could supplant her in her heiressship. Of course, she must know that if she marries without my consent before she is twenty-five she loses the property; but I see no reason to tell her more."

The lawyer thought otherwise, but he saw no need to argue the point then. All they need tell Margaret Marsh to-morrow was that she came of the grand old family of St. Clune; that until her majority a luxurious home awaited her with her grandfather's widow, the Countess of Combermere, and that when she was one-and-twenty she would enjoy almost unlimited wealth.

It was almost a silent journey to Marden the next day. Kenneth was not mercenary, yet he could not forget this village maiden, who had passed all her life in a little cottage was to be mistress of the grand old Abbey he

loved so well, and even in the very mansion of which he had once fancied his Kathleen queen.

"Of course, she can have no education," he reflected, moodily. "I suppose I ought to feel thankful if she does not drop the unfortunate letter H."

This was a subject on which Mr. Ashwin might enlighten him—he resolved to try.

"Educated!" repeated the lawyer, in a perplexed tone. "I don't suppose the child has half the accomplishments expected of the women of your world. Both the girls went for some years to a little school in Maidstone, and one of them—I forget which—stayed there afterwards as pupil-teacher."

A "little" school—it did not sound promising. Poor Kenneth prepared himself to have his finest sensibilities outraged. Should they be asked to tea? and if periwinkles were provided—he had a faint idea all poor people had winks for tea—would his cousin fish them out with a pin?

It was a good walk from the station, through pretty country lanes, beautiful in the spring loveliness of May. As he caught sight of the primroses raising their golden heads among the grass, Kenneth remembered the blue-eyed maiden whom he had seen in the Strand not more than a week ago, who told him gravely she was going to walk to Fulham.

Only a week ago! And in that week his whole fate had been decided. Then he was rich in hope and prospects; now all his hopes had died, and the only prospect before him was that of being known as a pauper earl. Only one week, which changed April to May, had been full of moment for poor Kenneth!

"This is the house," said Mr. Ashwin, slowly. "It is hardly altered at all. It was autumn when I brought Mrs. Marsh here eighteen years ago, but this might be the very next springtime for all the change."

He rang the bell and waited. Kenneth looked round. The garden was large for such a cottage; the spring flowers already made it bright and cheerful, but a shadow seemed to hang over the house; not a sound came from it, and each of the neat white blinds were lowered.

"I had better have written," said the lawyer, in a vexed tone; "they must have looked up the house and gone for a walk. I fancy it's a custom people have when they live in villages like this."

But at that moment the door opened, and a dark-eyed woman, weakly dressed, asked what they wanted. She looked too grand a servant for the tiny house, and her face and figure were not what we generally associate with white-aproned Phyllis. This woman might have been thirty-five. She was dressed in black serge, which showed every line of her splendid figure. There was no cap on her crisp, wavy hair, but she had a coarse apron tied round her waist, and she said "Sir!" quite naturally.

"Is Mrs. Marsh at home?"

Sally stared. She looked the speaker up and down as though she considered him a fit inmate for Bedlam. The lawyer, who knew trouble had given his protégée many nervous fancies, imagined one of them was an objection to strangers. Very likely she had given her singular handmaiden orders to deny her.

"Your mistress will see me," said Mr. Ashwin to Sally. "Tell her her old friend, Mr. Ashwin, has come all the way from London to have a chat with her."

Sally's face relaxed.

"And you're Mr. Ashwin!"

He took out one of his cards and showed it her. Really getting into Mrs. Marsh's cottage was like getting into a strong garrisoned castle it seemed to him.

"I'd better tell you myself," said Sally, quietly. "It'll save the children the task. You can't see Mrs. Marsh!"

"You will at least take my card, my good woman. I am your mistress's greatest friend."

"The Lord be thanked," said Sally, with such intense feeling it saved the phrase from all suspicion of cant or humbug. "And it's only this morning she wrote to ask you to come."

She held open the door of the little parlour for them to enter.

"Then you think Mrs. Marsh will see us, after all," observed the lawyer. "But why did she send for me. Is she in any trouble?"

"The mistress is right enough," said Sally. "It's the young ladies who are in trouble; they've well nigh cried their eyes out, pretty dears, though I do keep telling 'em Heaven is a deal better place than Marden, and that their mother's gone there if ever anyone did."

Mr. Ashwin started.

"Not dead!" he said, slowly. "Woman, you surely do not mean Mrs. Marsh is dead?"

"Just that, sir. She'd been ailing a few days, and the doctor couldn't rouse her; she seemed just sinking away, and this morning we found her dead."

"Alone!"

"Miss Margaret had been with her the best part of the night; but when she thought the mistress asleep she went back to bed. There was no one to tell her, poor child; it was the sleep of death. She's shut up in her own room now is Miss Margaret; she won't let no one go near her. But she did write your name and address on a bit of paper, and say Miss Nell must send for you."

"I must have crossed the letter. Will you tell the young ladies I am here? I believe by their mother's will I stand as guardian to both, and I would gladly make acquaintance with my wards, and do all I can to help them."

"He's come, Miss Nell!" announced Sally, when she went back to the kitchen where Nell sat by the fire shivering. In her great and overwhelming sorrow the poor child could not bear to be alone; and, indeed, there was something in Queenie's conduct which might well augment her sister's grief.

The two sisters had never quarrelled. Used

from infancy to give way to Queenie, naturally of a gentler type, Nell had never resisted her elder's imperious sway, and in return Queenie had petted her. There had been no dissensions between them until this sorrow, which surely should have drawn them closer together, and which, instead, had parted them.

"Let me alone," said Queenie, passionately. "I won't talk to you about her. I won't listen to what you say. She was your mother, and I daresay you are sorry for her. I think she has treated us both abominably, and I mean to write to Mr. Ashwin at once. He will know how to take care of me, and protect me from the wiles and machinations of such creatures as you."

"Sally," exclaimed the poor girl, helplessly, turning in her bewilderment to the faithful servant, "what does it mean? For pity's sake tell me. Has trouble turned her brain?"

Sally looked as bewildered as her young lady.

"I don't think it's that, Miss Nell," she said, kindly. "Anyway, the sight of you seems to excite her, so I'd just leave her alone. I daresay Mr. Ashwin will be here to-day or to-morrow, and then he'll talk to her."

So Nell had taken the advice of her humble friend, and left her sister alone. After that first burst of passion Queenie had hardly spoken. She spent the entire day in her own room. She did not write to Mr. Ashwin as she had threatened, but sent down his name and address, with orders for Nell to perform the task.

Poor Nell, she had never heard his name before. Sally told her briefly that years and years before, when she first came to the cottage, Mrs. Marsh had told her that Mr. Ashwin was her only friend, and that if anything happened to her he must be appealed to at once in the children's interest.

"But lor, Miss Nell," resumed Sally, quietly, "that's nearly fifteen years ago, and the name had slipped right out of my head."

Nell shivered. A nameless fear oppressed her; she knew not what she dreaded, but she felt quite sure that trouble was in store.

When she went up later in the day to look at the calm pale face she had so loved, and strew flowers over her quiet form, a new discovery faced her. The old desk, so long the object of her mother's greatest reverence, had disappeared. The wooden box stood open. Nell knew by instinct that Queenie had taken the desk into her own keeping, and most likely examined the contents of the box; it filled her with horror.

"How could she!" thought the poor sensitive child, "almost before our mother's lips were cold. How could she disobey her dearest wish. She is the eldest; no doubt she had a right to the desk, but she need not have taken it now. She might have waited."

And so that first terrible day of bereavement wore on. It was afternoon, and Sally had come to tell her Mr. Ashwin was in the parlour.

"I've seen a great deal of men, Miss Nell, one way and another, and I'm bound to say they're mostly bad. Still, Mr. Ashwin looks as if he was not so bad as the rest, and the young fellow with him might be a duke."

Nell rose wearily and left the kitchen. Sally watched her anxiously, and then sat down as though affairs had grown so serious she must settle herself comfortably to consider their aspect.

"It's the queerest thing I've ever heard on," she remarked out loud, "and I haven't seen the end of it yet. The missis would have done better to trust me. I'd have been true to her. As it happens, though, I've found out for myself as much as she could have told me. I couldn't see her worry herself with those 'turn-outs,' and not find out what vexed her. I've known the truth a goodish while now; and I expect, poor thing, if she'd ever had the courage to open that bundle of letters she kept so carefully, and never even read because they weren't hers, she'd know by the dates a few of them were missing. She'd never guess where they were."

"And Miss Queenie's to be a great lady! I reckon that's pretty safe. I always loved her. She'd a look in her eyes seemed to bring my dead baby back to me. Well she'll be a duchess, I shouldn't wonder—and she'll owe it all to me."

Meanwhile Nell, clothed in the self-same black dress in which she had made her expedition to London, went in to see Mr. Ashwin. Her eyes were tear-stained now, and her cheeks were pale and wan, yet Kenneth recognised her at once.

"Is it possible you remember me!"

Mr. Ashwin looked amazed, so the young Earl explained the simple nature of his solitary meeting with the young lady. Then Nell sat down, her eyes bent on the ground, her whole face stamped with a great sorrow.

"This is a very sudden blow," began the lawyer, kindly. "My dear, will you tell me your name? Which of my friend's daughters are you?"

"The youngest. Mother always called me Nell," and the tears broke out again.

Mr. Ashwin and Kenneth exchanged glances. Of course, this was the widow's own child.

"And your sister?"

"Queenie is upstairs."

"Will you ask her to come to join us?"

"I can't; she is so angry with me. I can't make it out. She has only spoken to me once since mother's death, and then she said we had both been deceived. It was cruel of her, for mother would never have deceived us; besides, she loved Queenie dearly."

The gentlemen took this speech to imply the speaker was conscious of having been her mother's favourite, but that she was sure Queenie had been loved too. Quite innocent of the wrong impression they had received, Nell went on.

"You will tell her it is all a mistake, and that mother was all goodness, won't you? And please ask her not to shut herself up, I want her so!"

"My poor child!" and Mr. Ashwin rested his hand gently on Nell's golden head; "I cannot tell Margaret her suspicions are a mistake. You have both been deceived, but the deception was planned from kindness, and carried out with the best of motives. You must have noticed your mother did not love you and Margaret equally."

Nell's face blanched.

"She was very fond of me," she said, pleadingly; "but Margaret was the eldest."

"My dear, the difference was natural enough; you were her own child! Margaret is no relation, nothing but a friendless orphan, to whom out of divine charity your mother gave a home!"

Nell started.

"Not my sister! Queenie not my mother's child! What do you mean?"

"It is a long story, my dear, but one that does the greatest credit to your mother. Very early in her widowhood she had a long and terrible illness. She owed her life, and probably her reason, to the tender nursing of a friend. Very soon after that friend died; and your mother, in response to her last wish, promised to keep her baby girl until such time as its grandparents should send for it. I think among your mother's papers there must be proofs of this, and also of the identity of 'Queenie' with the baby confided to your mother years ago."

"Queenie was with mother at the last. She told me she was better, and I had gone to bed; she seemed to prefer Queenie to be with her."

Both men could understand that. In the widow's last hours she must be haunted with fears for the future of the poor child whose history, if revealed, must give her a heritage of shame. She had nothing to fear for her nursing.

"I should like to see your sister."

"Will you try and make her think kindly of mother?"

"My dear, it will be the blackest of ingratitude if she ever has any but loving

thoughts of your mother. Now, will you send for her?"

Perhaps Queenie thought the London lawyer was not a person to be trifled with, for she came at once. Splendidly beautiful, no tears dimmed her eyes. She moved towards Mr. Ashwin with slow, graceful steps.

"You will take care of me."

His heart did not go out to her as it had gone to Nell, but she was certainly a ward to be proud of. The daughters of the St. Clunes were noted for their beauty, but few of them could have rivalled this radiant vision.

"You, I suppose, are Margaret?"

"Margaret Lyon," replied the girl, proudly. "I have been hidden all these years under a false name, but I know the truth at last!"

"And the truth is that you owe undying gratitude to your foster-mother," said Mr. Ashwin, gravely, "please remember that."

"She was all kindness," confessed Queenie, "and I loved her dearly. Indeed, I was hurt and angry when first I heard I had no right to mourn her as Nell had. She only told me my own story last night."

"Did she tell it you all?" asked Kenneth.

Margaret sighed.

"I think so. Her idea was that I came of a noble family, and she thought, with the aid of some papers she left, sealed and addressed to Mr. Ashwin, I might be restored to the position that is my birthright!"

"And leave me, Queenie! Dear, are you going to hate me because I am not your sister?"

Nell's blue eyes were wet with tears. Perhaps Queenie's conscience pricked her, perhaps she thought wickedness to her foster-sister would not impress the gentlemen favourably. She stooped and kissed Nell's open brow.

"I was awfully cross to you," she confessed. "But, oh, Nell! it was all so bewildering, I could not recognise anything! I was myself, and yet somebody else! My head felt almost turned!"

"And you don't really believe anything against mother?"

Margaret sighed.

"You couldn't fancy that, surely, Nell! I loved her as well as you could; only when I thought of how she had pinched and scraped all these years, and how very happy a little more money would have made her, I did think it a cruel shame my relations should have left me a burden on her hands!"

Ken smiled.

"Do you know you are attacking me? I fancy I am the nearest relation you possess in the world, and I candidly tell you a week ago I had never heard of your existence!"

"Are you my brother?"

"I am your third or fourth cousin, I hardly know which."

Margaret sighed.

"A cousin is not much of a relation."

"But your grandfather's widow, one of the sweetest and kindest hearted women I ever knew, will be your guardian for the present, and until you come of age your home will be with her."

"What is her name?"

"Lady Combermere."

The girl's eyes sparkled at the title.

"And what is my name? Am I Lady Combermere too?"

Kenneth tried not to meet Mr. Ashwin's eye. He knew the lawyer would smile at the thought of how Miss Margaret might really wear that title.

"You are Miss St. Clune," he said, quietly.

"At least you will be recognised as such as soon as a few formalities have been gone through. Everything must be done legally, for you will be an heiress one of these days."

"She always wanted to be rich," said Nell, kindly. "It is just as though a fairy had promised her whatever she wished for."

"I hope she will be happy," said Mr. Ashwin, gravely. "Happiness is better than riches!"

"Shall I fetch you the papers," asked Mar-

garet, "or would you like to take them away with you?"

"I think that would be better. And now, my dears, tell me what I can do for you? Of course, I will see the doctor, and make all arrangements for the funeral. Would you like to stay here till it is over? I do not doubt Lady Combermere will be pleased to see Miss Marsh on a long visit till her plans are settled."

Nell shook her head.

"I do not think I should like that. I should feel out of place; besides, I have a plan of my own."

"And what is it?"

"We must keep on this house till June. I should like to stay here with Sally. Then," flushing scarlet, "mother's income dies with her; but I have got a—a kind of situation—I mean work which will bring in quite enough to keep me and Sally. I have been promised it will last six weeks, and by that time my greatest friends will be home from Italy."

"And who are they?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Ainslie."

"Of Fulham? I know them well! You couldn't be in kinder hands. I think your plan of staying here till they return a very good one, if you are sure you will not go to Lady Combermere."

"I am quite sure."

"She must come later on," said Queenie, sweetly. "I should like to leave here quite quietly, without anyone knowing the wonderful change that has come about. I shouldn't like to be the heroine of a paragraph, headed 'Romantic Story,' in the local papers."

She had her way. No hint was breathed in Marden of the deception practised by Mrs. Marsh in calling both girls her daughters. Mr. Baillie and one or two friends, who thought themselves privileged to inquire, heard that directly after the funeral Queenie would go to reside with some of her father's family, but Nell would stay on for the present at the Cottage.

"Only," pleaded Queenie, the last night she and Nell were to spend together, "you must promise me one thing. You will have left Marden before Austin Brooks comes home?"

"Why? Surely you will write to him?"

"I have written," said Queenie; but I know him; he would always be coming here to talk about me. Nell, promise me you will leave here in June, or that if you stay you will not tell Austin Brooks anything about me!"

"He is not likely to ask me if you have written to him."

"Promise," said Queenie, beseechingly.

And then, against all her instincts, poor Nell promised.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2010. Back numbers can be obtained through any News-agent.)

THE HOME LIGHT.

The light of home's a wondrous light,

So tender is its shining,

So soft it follows through the night,

Our weary road outlining.

Though lonely and for years we roam,

Far from the ones who love us,

Yet ever shines the light of home,

Like God's grace spread above us.

The light of home's a wondrous light,

Through life it follows, seeming,

Yet when with age the hair is white,

Clear in the front 'tis gleaming.

It shines from where our loved ones are,

Oh, this is love's divining!

And through the gates of heaven ajar

At last we see it shining!

WANTED to Purchase a Set of "LONDON READER," or any Back Volumes.—B. F., Stevens and Brown, 4, Trafalgar Square, London, W.C.

Christmas 1901

Next week's number of the LONDON READER will mainly consist of seasonable stories and articles suited to Christmas-time

The NOVELETTE is a particularly charming story, entitled,

His Christmas Gift

By the Author of

"MORE KITH THAN KIN,"

"HER JUST REWARD," etc., etc.

Substantial instalments of our highly interesting and sensational SERIAL STORIES will also appear.



In addition to the above and the usual regular features we shall also include special articles peculiarly appropriate to the festive season.



AT CHRISTMAS TIME

is a light and vivacious description of what we are all looking forward to at this time of the year.

OMENS FOR GOOD AND ILL

tells how many old beliefs are dying out, chiefly owing to the changed conditions of modern life.



This splendid Number will be on Sale everywhere

NEXT TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3rd,

and the price will be One Penny, as usual.

Order at once, and so make sure of securing a copy.

Gleanings

CURIOS FACT: Stout people are very soon fatigued.

PRETTY SOON you will see a little duck of a bonnet on a little goose of a woman.

The liners of sleeping cars in France must bear a ticket indicating to the passenger the date of the last cleaning, and they must be thoroughly washed and subjected to a high temperature.

ONE hundred tons of cats' tails were recently sold in London in one lot. They are intended as an ornamentation for ladies' wearing apparel. Each tail weighed an average of two ounces; and this means that about 1,792,000 cats were slaughtered to complete the consignment.

THE Araucarian, of Southern Chili, use the cast-off shell of a crab as a barometer. It is white in fair, dry weather, but the approach of a moist atmosphere is indicated by the appearance of small red spots. As the moisture in the air increases the shell becomes entirely red, and continues so throughout the rainy season.

THE advance of civilisation is noted in the Holy Land, where American beer has become a popular beverage. Jerusalem now has electric lights, telephones, and phonographs; and trolley lines are talked of to connect that celebrated city with Bethany, Bethlehem, the Lake of Galilee, and other places famous in Bible history.

A PECULIAR tombstone rests over a grave in a cemetery near Evansville. A corner of the marble step is adorned with the sculptured resemblance of a bunch of young onions, and it hangs over the edge of the stone as if carelessly placed there. This is in accordance with the wish of the lady buried there, who was very fond of onions.

IRISH TOBACCO.—Tobacco-growing in Ireland was a matter which attracted a good deal of attention a couple of years ago, and the Department of Agriculture for Ireland has been prosecuting experiments since, and has now for disposal a quantity of tobacco manufactured from the crop grown in various parts of the island in 1900. The crop of 1899 sold, after payment of the duty of 3s. per pound, at a price sufficiently good to make tobacco-growing in Ireland a profitable crop. The tobacco made from the crop of 1900 is not by any means so strong as that of 1899, and, having been grown and manufactured by a specially-appointed expert, should fetch a better price. The fault with the first crops was that the leaves grew too coarse, and the manufactured article was strong in taste.

FISHBITE FAULTS IN CABLES.—The Eastern Extension Telegraph Company have discovered some interesting facts in connection with the interruptions, due to various agencies, which are continually occurring in submarine telegraph cables. Faults apparently due to fishbite have been removed from time to time from several of the shallow water sections of that company's system, which have either totally interrupted telegraphic communication or have seriously affected the working of the lines. Cables established in deeper waters have not hitherto, however, been similarly attacked. A fault removed a few months ago from the company's Sydney-Nelson section at as great a depth as 550 fathoms was found to contain a tooth firmly fixed in the core of the cable, although the core—or interior portion of the cable containing the conductor—was protected by the usual sheathing of thick iron wires and outer coverings. An expert examination of the tooth proved it to belong, undoubtedly, to a species of shark, the exact variety of which could not be identified; but it appears that five known varieties of sharks are found to exist at a depth of 300 fathoms, and one at a depth of even 500 fathoms.

A POLISHED DELIVERY.—Cuffs and collars from the laundry.

BEHIND THE BARS.—The singer that doesn't keep up with the accompanist.

QUESTION FOR DEBATING CLUBS.—Can a man, while asleep in the daytime, have the nightmare?

It is never too late to mend. But a man cannot expect to have a button sewed on much after midnight.

FAST railroad speed is regularly made between Milan and Varese, in Italy. By the use of an electric third rail the fifty miles are covered in fifty minutes.

THERE was a remarkable gathering at the funeral of a doctor recently. Before his death the doctor provided that every one attending his funeral should have a free dinner, and over a thousand persons availed themselves of his offer at the two leading hotels, where arrangements had been made to feed the multitude.

News comes from America of a new system of physical exercises which is becoming extremely popular. It is like all other systems in promising wonderful health in almost no time, and a gain or a loss in flesh at the discretion and desire of the exerciser. But it has one marked peculiarity. Its exercises are accompanied by no apparent movements of the body. The theory is, briefly put, that by contracting the muscles of the arms and legs you obtain, without any untoward movement of these limbs, exercise in its most concentrated form. The system is taught only by letter, and the inventor says that five minutes, night and morning, in your own bedroom, and with no apparatus, will do wonders.

THEY have a curious way of doing business in New York. It is a fixed law to allow to the customer the sensation of having the "best" of any argument. A gentleman wrote to a large store complaining that one of his purchases had been left out of the package sent home to him, and before nightfall a small boy appeared with the duplicate of the article, which the customer would have accepted had he not already discovered the missing object. "It was in the toe of the slipper," he explained. "Was it?" said the boy. "It must have worked down. I put it in the heel." "Did you wrap it in the bundle yourself?" asked the astounded purchaser. "Yes, sir." "Did you tell your proprietor so?" "Yes, sir." "Why didn't you tell me you did?" "We ain't allowed."

THE Koh-i-Noor, which is to form the centre ornament of Queen Alexandra's crown, had a narrow escape before it reached the late Queen. After the annexation of the Punjab in 1849 it was given up to the British, and at a meeting of the board was handed to John (afterwards Lord) Lawrence in a small box beneath many folds of linen for safe keeping. He placed it in his waistcoat pocket, and forgot the treasure. When he dressed for dinner the waistcoat containing it was thrown carelessly on one side. At a subsequent meeting of the Punjab Board Henry Lawrence suggested to his brother the advisability of at once forwarding the Koh-i-Noor to Queen Victoria. John Lawrence had forgotten that the diamond had been given him; then suddenly remembering, he quitted the board with an unruddied countenance, hurried home and inquired of his man-servant if he had seen a small box which had been left in his waistcoat pocket. "Yes, sahib," the man replied, "I found it and put it in one of your drawers." "Bring it here," said Lawrence. The servant produced it. "Now," said his master, "open it and see what it contains." The old native obeyed, and after removing the folds of linen, he said, "There is nothing here, sahib, but a bit of glass." "Good," said John Lawrence, with a sigh of relief, "you can leave it with me."

THE curative powers of Christian Science are apparently not limited to human beings. Mrs. Hinsdale, a wealthy society woman, of New Rochelle, says Christian Science has not only cured her, but it has cured several of her pet Angora cats and helped her to find another cat which had been lost for three weeks. Most of Mrs. Hinsdale's cures have been effected by what she calls "absent treatment," or treatment by telephone.

NOVEMBER is an important month to marrying people in certain villages in the Netherlands, and each Sunday bears its distinctive name to indicate the course of courtship. The celebrations commence on the Thursday previous to the first Sunday, when the fair is held and the various couples perform in the country dance, which opens the revels. On the following Sunday—Review Sunday—the single young men and women, after morning service, walk up and down for inspection, and make mental choice. On the second—Decision Sunday—each young man salutes the one he favours, and judges from the response the measure of his success. The third—Purchase Sunday—the parents are interviewed, and marriage settlements arranged. During the following week the couples are married, but not until the fourth—Possession Sunday—does the bridegroom take over his newly-acquired property.

POVERTY AND WEALTH.

The stork flew over a town one day,
And back of each wing an infant lay;
One to a rich man's house he brought,
And one he left at a labourer's cot.
The rich man said, "My son shall be
A lordly ruler o'er land and sea."
The labourer sighed, "Tis the good God's will
That I have another month to fill."
The rich man's son grew strong and fair,
And prond with the pride of a millionaire.
His motto in life was, "Live while you may,"
And he crowded years in a single day.
He bought position and name and place,
And he bought him a wife with a handsome face.
He journeyed over the whole wide world,
But discontent in his heart lay curled
Like a serpent hidden in leaves and moss,
And life seemed hollow and gold was dross;
He scoffed at women, and doubted God,
And died like a beast and went back to the sod.
The son of the labourer tilled the soil,
And thanked God daily for health and toil.
He wedded for love in his youthful prime,
And two lives chorded in tune and time.
His wants were simple and simple his creed,
To trust God fully; it served his need,
And lightened his labour, and helped him to die
With a smile on his lips and a hope in his eye.
When all is over and all is done,
Now which of these men was the richer one?

— E. W. W.

INHALE PURE AIR.

If you want to be made better, physically, mentally, and morally, keep in the open air as much as possible. During the winter we necessarily live a more or less unnatural life. We breathe the air vitiated by stoves and furnaces, with all the vital qualities baked out of it, and hence during the winter we subject ourselves to a gradual process of slow poisoning. The antidote for this poisoning is fresh air. So this universal instinct to get out of doors during the spring is a natural instinct, which, like all natural instincts, has a cause based on the internal condition of things. It is nature's effort to expel the poison accumulated during the winter. Man is naturally an open-air animal. Climatic conditions, however, render open-air life sometimes impossible. As soon as these conditions are removed the old primal instinct to get out beneath the sky asserts itself, and this instinct cannot be disregarded except at the peril of health. Go into the open air every day, and stay there as long as you can.

THE GOLDEN HOPE

SUMMARY OF OPENING CHAPTERS.

Lady Redwoode, the owner and undisputed proprietor of all the fair domain of Redwoode, has been left a widow a year or more previous to the opening of the story. Lord Redwoode left no heir, but expressed a wish that on the decease of his wife the estates should pass to their nephew, Andrew Forsythe, and never doubted Lady Redwoode's compliance with his wishes. Mr. Forsythe was musing over many things, and wondering what would happen to him should his aunt marry again. Judge then of his surprise when Lady Redwoode tells him the story of her early life. Secretly married when quite a girl, in order not to arouse the anger of her brother, with whom she was living in India, there came a day when it was necessary to tell all, and the scene that followed caused Lady Redwoode to fall into convulsions, and she lay ill for many weeks. On returning to life and consciousness, it was to find herself a widow and a mother. Her husband had been cruelly assassinated; and the child given over to her sister-in-law to pass as the twin sister with her own, born a few hours earlier. To satisfy her ambitious brother, Lady Redwoode passed as a maiden.

Now her brother is dead, and as an act of reparation has sent all the necessary proofs of her first marriage, but the secret of the identity of her own child dies with him. The two girls are coming to England, and it is for Lady Redwoode to discover which of the two is her daughter.

CHAPTER III.

SIR RICHARD HAUGHTON was ushered by his guide into a front chamber of the inn, at the head of the stairs, and the door was softly closed behind him, Mr. Sorel stealing noiselessly away along the corridor, and passing into the adjoining room. The apartment in which the baronet found himself was long and low, furnished and kept with scrupulous neatness, and provided with two large windows, through whose open sashes the warm summer breeze was permitted to enter. Not a shadow of gloominess was anywhere visible, and the usual paraphernalia of an invalid's chamber had been reduced to a row of phials and bottles, which were rather ostentatiously displayed upon the low wooden mantelpiece.

But Sir Richard noticed none of these things. Upon a low French bedstead near the centre of the room, propped up by pillows, and surrounded by a cloud of flowing muslin and rose-hued cambric that depended from a gilt crown above the bed, lay a woman, and upon her the baronet's gaze was fixed from the moment of his entrance into her presence.

She had started slightly at the sound of his firm and even footsteps upon the floor, had darted one eager glance from her retreat, and had then fallen back upon her pillow, her eyelids drooping upon her cheek as if in sleep. It was thus that the baronet first observed her, and he approached the bedside, quietly folded his arms across his breast, and looked at her with a scornful, contemptuous expression that had showed how thoroughly he was acquainted with her wiles.

She was several years older than he, and had evidently once been very beautiful. She was handsome still, but her beauty was of that sort which we style well preserved, meaning that it already showed some signs of decay.

Her long brown hair fell in glossy lengths over her pillow; one white and rounded arm lay carelessly upon the pink covering of her couch; and the light that filtered in through her bed curtains played in a tremulous, rosy wave over her face.

Her features had not been sharpened by illness, nor had the broken heart of which her brother had spoken left any impress upon them.

Her cheeks were fair and rounded, and the bloom of health was faintly perceptible through a delicate and skilful application of white powder.

Margaret Sorel was an actress by profession, and considered very clever at counterfeiting the various human passions and weaknesses. That

she was counterfeiting illness now to further some purpose of her own her visitor evidently suspected.

With a curling lip, therefore, a stern, uncompromising gaze, folded arms, he continued to regard her.

For some moments she continued to feign unconsciousness, then her eyelids quivered, she opened them slowly, and looked at him in well-acted mental terror and physical weakness.

"Oh, Richard!" she cried, feebly, covering unaffectedly before his stern gaze. "Richard—husband!"

"I do not wish to hear either of those names from your lips, Margaret Sorel," was the unmoved response. "I am not your husband—"

"I know the law freed you from me seven years ago, Richard," interrupted the woman, eagerly, yet with pretended faintness. "I know that our marriage was a marriage only in name, and that not for a single hour did you ever acknowledge me as your wife. And yet you loved me once, Richard—"

"Yes, I did love you, Margaret Sorel," and Sir Richard's face was full of supreme self-contempt for that past weakness, "but I was then a mere boy. You were an actress, a woman of the world, years older than I in age, centuries older in feeling. I was ardent, impetuous, foolish. The college boys vied with each other in offering gifts at your shrine, but you singled me out from them all as your favourite. You led me on from giving gifts to offering you marriage. You made me believe you as pure and chaste as Diana, as holy as a saint, and as tender and womanly as the Madonna. And I was mad enough to ask you to become my wife. The disparity in our ages you declared unworthy of consideration, and lured me on by flattering my boyish vanity, making me think myself successful where titled lords had sued in vain. You knew that not one guileful thought had ever entered my heart towards you; you knew that I was the heir of an old and honoured name and of vast property; and you said to yourself that you would profit by my infatuation and secure a footing in society and a home!"

"Oh, Richard!" pleaded the woman, more troubled by the calmness of his tones than by his words.

"You know I speak the truth," responded the Baronet, with increasing sternness. "You lured me on to a secret marriage, although I would have wedded you before the whole world. You feared that my father would prevent our union, and you therefore carefully arranged that our union should be strictly private. You went to reside in a quiet part of the town; our banns were published at a little, old-fashioned, almost unfrequented church; and in due time we were married!"

"Yes, we were married!" murmured the actress, as if in that fact she possessed a stronghold of security.

"We were married," repeated Sir Richard, but it is impossible to describe the soothing with which he uttered these words. "From the church we went to your temporary residence to obtain your effects, which were to accompany us on our journey to Sea View. We found at your lodgings one of your relatives, a brother older than the one who summoned me here to-day. You sent me out on some trivial errand that you might converse with him in private. I obeyed you without suspecting your motive, and hastened my return to you. As I opened the door that conducted me into your presence I heard a few words that held me spell-bound, speechless. I stood there, unable to retreat or advance, hearing words that burned into my soul like burning coals; from those words, laughingly, gaily uttered, I learned that the woman for

whom I had braved my father's anger—for whom I had sacrificed my youth and ambitions, whom I had regarded as the bright incarnation of all womanly virtues, was without one particle of real affection for me. I learned that she had speculated upon my infatuation, that she was vile and heartless, that she was devoid of nobleness or goodness, and that she was a stranger to purity and virtue. I could not see her again. I rushed from the house, hastened by the first train to Sea View, and made known to my father the story of my rashness and folly. He gave me his sympathy and assistance, and set to work to procure my legal freedom. He succeeded in doing so, without unnecessary publicity, and there are few who know that I was ever married. So, Margaret Sorel, you are without a single claim upon me, and I know not why you should have summoned me to your presence."

The woman had writhed upon her couch during this address, and her cheeks had flushed and paled under the white powder covering them, and once or twice her hands had caught fiercely at the bed-covering as if she had a sensation as of falling. Now, in a trembling voice, she said,—

"It is true, Richard—yet not all true. You never would see me, nor hear my defence. You returned all my letters unopened, and would never give me an opportunity of justifying myself."

"It was not necessary."

"But Richard, when I boasted to my brother that I had won you and an honourable name, and that I despised you for your simple mindedness, I spoke falsely. He knew me too well to believe me if I had uttered other sentiments to him. Yet, Richard, I did love you as I had never loved before. I loved you for the very innocence I contemned, for your truthfulness and straightforwardness, for your implicit confidence in me, and for your many noble qualities. I loved you for yourself alone, and not for your wealth, title, or position."

She spoke in an impassioned tone, raising herself upon her elbow, and looking at him with a countenance flushed with hope and eagerness.

His only answer was a bitter smile.

"Believe me, Richard," she cried, and even the cynical Baronet noticed the thrill of genuine anguish that pulsed through her voice.

"Do not look so coldly upon me. Does not your heart quicken at the sound of my voice? Is there no dull aching in your breast when I recall the past when you and I were lovers?"

"None whatever," said Sir Richard, coldly.

She raised towards him a pale, incredulous face, unable to believe her old power over him entirely vanished. She thought, perhaps, that his folded arms pressed against a heart that yearned to receive her again, for in a low, passionate voice, she said:—

"Richard, you do not know yourself. True love never dies. All these years I have thought of you, loved you, and tried to make myself worthy of you, believing and hoping that the time would come when you would forgive me and take me back to your heart. When your father died I wrote to you, thinking your heart might be softened, but you sent back the letter unopened. Again and again, by various ruses, I have sought to bring about an interview with you, but I could never accomplish it. But all the time you have loved me, Richard, and all your efforts could not uproot me from your heart."

She paused, evidently expecting him to protest violently against her assertion, but he simply answered, calmly and coldly:

"You deceive yourself, madam."

"I do not deceive myself. If your heart had not been wounded to its core, why did you bury yourself alive in your country home? I have heard of the hermit's life you lead, of your few friendships, and infrequent visitors, and I know it is for love of me that you have turned your back on the world. I have lived an upright life since we parted, Richard. Your father is dead, and you have no relatives. No

one can protest against anything you can do. Forgive me, then, Richard—dear Richard, and take me back again as your wife, your unworthy, but loving wife."

She held out her pair of snowy, rounded arms to him, as if to enfold him, and raised to him a passionate, Circean face that would have beguiled a weaker man. But Sir Richard Haughton's hatred of falsehood and his thorough knowledge of her unworthiness were an effectual safeguard against the arts of the actress, and his noble heart beat quite as steadily and evenly as before. The time had past for ever when a glance from the eyes of Margaret Sorel had power to move him.

"You have misjudged me," he said, calmly, in tones that rang in the ears of the divorced wife like a funeral knell. "I am not living a retired life because I love you, Margaret Sorel. I do not love you; I scarcely hate you. I think I am perfectly indifferent towards you. I came here expecting to witness your death, and I must say that the thought did not cost me one pang of sorrow. I agree with you that true love never dies. But I have yet to feel the first thrill of that ennobling passion."

A great cry of anguish burst from the woman's lips, and she fell back on the pillow.

"It is true," he said, gravely, even solemnly, and his blue eyes bore witness to his sincerity. "I have never yet loved. My affection for you was not worthy the name. I felt for you a passing boyish fancy, a brief, childish infatuation, founded upon a belief in your purity, goodness, and love for me. In the hour when I knew you as you were that fancy was dissipated like dew in the sunlight. But you destroyed my faith in my fellows, and, until recently, I was willing to regard you as a type of woman. Thank Heaven, I have been undeceived!"

"Then you do not love me?" said Margaret Sorel, in a wailing tone.

"Love you, knowing what you are?" returned the baronet, with a cool smile and a look of surprise. "Do you think me more than human?"

The divorced wife moaned faintly, and her glance was full of wild despair.

"I love you," she said, almost in a whisper. "Oh, Richard, have pity upon me! I love you with all my heart and soul. If you were a beggar, I would gladly share your crust. I will be your servant—your slave; only take me back again, dear, dear Richard!"

"I would as soon take a leper to my bosom," replied the baronet, with a gesture of disgust. "Was it to make this appeal you summoned me here? Is your illness like yourself, a sham?"

As he asked the question he looked around him, receiving his answer in the artful arrangements that met his glance. The vases of early roses, the pink bed-drapery, the open windows, through which on gentle zephyrs came floating in the odour emitted from clover-fields, and the soft rosy light trembling and fluttering over Margaret Sorel's face, all assured him that her assumed illness was one of the many ruses by which since their divorce she had striven to bring about an interview. He felt instinctively that she was not even ill, and his heart hardened towards her.

For an instant he directed a contemptuous look at her as she cowered before him in her unfeigned anguish, and then he made a motion to depart.

"Stay—one moment!" she pleaded, starting up, with a wild face, and speaking in a faltering voice. "You said that you no longer regard me as a type of woman. It is true, then, that you are in love with Lady Redwoode!"

"If to regard her as the noblest and purest of created beings is to be in love with her, then I am in love with Lady Redwoode," said the baronet, quietly. "If you mean to ask if I expect to marry her ladyship, permit me to say that she is yet in mourning for her late husband, and that my love for her is the love of a younger brother—I might almost say son, if she were not so young."

Margaret Sorel looked relieved, yet dissatisfied.

"I—I heard you want every day to Redwoode," she murmured, "and I fancied you meant to marry her. Oh, Richard, if you hate me, you must not love any other woman. Promise me that you will never marry again!"

At this juncture the door opened softly, and a strange, weird face was thrust for an instant through the aperture. It regarded the couple a moment in evident surprise, and was then noiselessly withdrawn, without having been perceived.

Sir Richard could not resist a smile at the demand, and replied:

"I decline to fetter myself with promises in regard to my future. I consider myself free to marry if a favourable opportunity offers, and shall not consult you about it. Let our acquaintance end here. I never wish to look upon your face again. Whatever ruse you may choose to employ, I shall not be again entrapped into an interview with you!"

He bowed, and turned on his heel, going towards the door.

"You have repulsed me and my love," cried Margaret Sorel, in a sharp, angry, and vindictive tone that compelled him to halt upon the very threshold. "You have scorned me, Sir Richard Haughton, and I swear that no other woman shall ever become your wife, love whom you will; but in the hour when you hope to claim your bride your heart shall know the bitterness and despair that convulse mine at this moment! I shall yet avenge myself upon you!"

With these words ringing in his ears, the young baronet passed out of the chamber, while the divorced wife fell back, pale with rage, her eyes glittering fiercely, and her countenance animated by some terrible resolution.

For a moment only she remained so excited and with her mind so highly wrought up; then she gave a sharp scream and yielded to an hysterical attack that brought her brother from his concealment in the adjoining chamber.

His first act was to deluge her powdered face with the contents of a scent-bottle—his second to chafe her hands, while he reproached her for her maladroitness during the recent interview.

"A pretty mess you've made of it!" he exclaimed, when she had grown calmer, and began to comprehend his words. "You've put your foot into it this time, Margaret; you have spoiled all future chances of success with your rash threats—"

"I spoiled those chances years ago!" said the actress, with real tears now finding their way down her cheeks. "Richard said truly—he never loved me!"

"I do not believe he ever did," said Sorel, slowly. "But you might have revived his early fancy, it seems to me. I procured his presence by the cleverest of ruses, and the only one that would have had effect upon him. You were prepared to melt his heart and revive his old infatuation by a pretence of illness, and you had surrounded yourself by the most becoming appliances to set off your beauty and to do away with the effects of the last seven years. The play is played out, Margaret."

"Not quite," said the divorced wife, a vindictive light beaming in her eyes. "I love Richard Haughton, as you know, Thomas. You heard all I said to him. He has ripened into a noble, grand man, and I worship him. If he will not take me as his wife, he shall never marry any other woman. You know I mean what I say!"

"But you would not run into danger, Margaret?"

"Would I not? I would brave any danger to prevent his marriage with another. But enough of that," and the woman sat up upon her couch, and pushed away with a gesture of loathing the heavy masses of hair from her face. "The first act of the play has ended,

to correct your expression, Thomas. We have money enough—at least I have. You are devoted to me. I am not quite satisfied with Sir Richard Haughton's assertion about Lady Redwoode. It is true she is older than he, but I also was older; I mean to watch them, to make myself familiar with his very thoughts and with her every action. And, as I said, in the hour that is to crown his happiness, he shall know such disappointment as I now know!"

"Well, I will help you to the best of my power!" declared Mr. Sorel.

"I knew you would. Now leave me. We must quit this place at once, and I must dress."

He obeyed the mandate, leaving the apartment, and the actress sprang from her bed and engaged in her toilet, displaying a feverish activity strongly in contrast with her recently assumed illness.

CHAPTER IV.

The carriage, the rumbling of whose wheels had so startled Lady Redwoode, contained, indeed, the expected arrivals. This fact was proclaimed to Mr. Andrew Forsythe, as he stood on the steps of the carriage-porch, by the apparition of a turbaned Oriental head from the nearest window of the vehicle. He had not time to notice particularly the features beneath the turban, or more than that its owner appeared to be taking a hurried survey of the scene, himself included, for the carriage came rolling under the arches of the porch, and he was called upon, as his aunt's temporary representative, to welcome her daughter and niece to their future home.

Hastily descending the steps, he arrived at the door of the vehicle at the moment the driver opened it, and prepared to single out the heiress of Redwoode, but his curiosity was doomed to be defeated; it is true that the ladies were there, but both were deeply veiled, and Mr. Forsythe observed only two girlish, shrinking figures, both shrouded in Indian shawls, though the season was summer, and the weather inclined to sultriness.

"The Misses Glintwick, I suppose?" he said, feeling awkward and ill at ease for the first time in his life, and greatly at a loss for something appropriate to say. "Lady Redwoode has just received your telegram, and has sent me to conduct you to her presence. I am Andrew Forsythe, the nephew of the late Baron."

He introduced himself with recovered self-possession and a pleasant consciousness of his personal advantages. The young ladies bowed silently, and he assisted them to alight. The turbaned individual was helped out by the driver, and the new-comers were then conducted to the drawing room by their temporary host.

The maidens, as if weary with their journey, sank immediately into the embraces of a couple of easy-chairs, but the attendant remained standing, and, after a brief and satisfied glance about the luxurious apartment, turned a keen and piercing gaze upon Mr. Forsythe, who involuntarily returned it with interest.

She was the very ideal of an Indian ayah, tall and straight, with a figure inclining to *embonpoint*. Her eyes were black and glittering, but not large. Her complexion, a bright olive, was set off to admirable advantage by a gay-hued Madras kerchief, which she had wound gracefully about her head, and by an equally gay robe of Tuscan silk, of gorgeous dye, that fell around her ample form. Her lips were full, and her remaining features were those peculiar to her race. She carried herself like an Indian queen, and it was evident that obedience and submission were traits foreign to her character.

All this Mr. Forsythe observed at once. Later, he learned that the ayah had been a nautch-girl in her youth, and that she had attracted the notice of an English officer of high rank, whose morganatic wife she had become. The offspring of that unblessed union

had been a daughter, so it had been said, and rumour declared that the wife of Horatio Glintwick, the brother of Lady Redwoode, had been that child. Certain it was that the ayah had passed for the foster mother of the late Mrs. Glintwick, but that her affection for her had been too blind and too passionate for so slight a relationship. But, if the story were true, Lady Redwoode's late sister-in-law had been too proud and too prejudiced to acknowledge her Hindoo parent, and suspicious of the truth had, with society, never passed beyond conjecture.

For a full minute the ayah held Mr. Forsythe's gaze by a species of fascination, long enough for him to imagine that her glittering eyes had in them a serpent's power, and that she was attempting to read his character; then she averted her glance, and he directed his attention to the veiled young ladies.

He felt as if he were under a masked battery, conscious that they were regarding him behind their veils, and, with a return of his late feeling of awkwardness, he said:

"It may be proper to prepare you for your interview with Lady Redwoode. It is possible that the late Mr. Glintwick did not inform you that you are not sisters, but cousins; that but one of you is entitled to his name; and that the other is the daughter of Lady Redwoode by her first marriage in India with her brother's secretary. Mr. Glintwick thought it best to suppress the fact of that early marriage, his sister being but a mere child at the time, and he adopted her offspring as the twin-sister of his own child, which happened to have been born but a few hours earlier. One of you, therefore, has come to Redwoode to find a loving mother and a rightful home."

"The young ladies are familiar with the story, Mr. Forsythe," said the ayah, with a slight inclination of the head. "Mr. Glintwick, when dying, called them to him, and told them as much as you have said, and more."

"Which, then, may I ask, is Lady Redwoode's daughter?"

"They do not know themselves—no one knows. The secret died with Mr. Glintwick," and the ayah's tones had in them a triumphant thrill.

"The secret is not dead," returned Mr. Forsythe, with implicit reliance upon Lady Redwoode's recent assurances. "The mother's instinct will teach her which is her daughter. Be kind enough to follow me to the library, young ladies, where the baroness awaits you."

The maidens arose instantly and accompanied Mr. Forsythe to the apartment indicated, closely followed by the ayah, whose countenance betrayed a sudden uneasiness, as if she feared that the mother might recognize her child.

It was a lovely scene that met the gaze of the two young travellers when ushered into the grand old library. The curtains had all been drawn aside and the room was flooded with light, of a thousand hues, caught as it passed through the beautiful stained-glass windows. In the centre of that light, and as if in incarnation, with the slender rays of crimson, amber and azure trembling over her masses of golden hair, and playing upon her flowing robe, stood Lady Redwoode. Her stately figure was bent forward in an eager attitude, her arms were half outstretched, her blue eyes glowed like stars, her lips were parted, and her face was glorified by an expression of holy tenderness.

With one accord the two young girls stepped forward, throwing back their veils, and awaited her recognition.

Mr. Andrew Forsythe could not repress an exclamation of astonishment as she looked at them, and he wondered how Lady Redwoode could ever choose between them.

"This is Cecile," said the ayah, pointing to the maiden nearest the baroness. "The other is Hellice!"

Lady Redwoode turned her gaze from one to the other for a few moments in utter silence.

Cecile was tall, fair and slender, as she had fancied her. Her eyes were blue, deeply blue, and had in them an innocent, appealing look that went straight to the heart of the baroness. Her complexion was as fair and white as the snows that crowned her native Himalayas, and her hair, which was drawn away smoothly from her face, was like braided sunshine, so bright and golden was its colouring. Her cheeks had the exquisite tinting of the wild rose, and her small red mouth, with its full, sweet lips, wore an expression at once trustful and confiding. She had a high-bred air, and already her movements evinced something of the stateliness that distinguished Lady Redwoode. Something in her manner, or the fact that she had taken the more prominent position before the baroness, faintly suggested the idea that she was capable of superciliousness and overbearing haughtiness, but one would scarcely have dared to entertain long this conjecture after looking into her face.

Hellice stood a little behind her cousin, gazing with rapt admiration at the lovely vision whom even in her inmost heart she dared not hope would claim her as a daughter. She was a brunette, but her features had as little of the Asiatic in them as those of her cousin. Not so tall as Cecile, she was more slender, and was endowed with a peculiar, airy grace to which the blonde beauty was a stranger. Her figure was lithe and willowy, swaying under every zephyr of emotion like a rose-tree in the breeze. Her movements had the quickness of the panther; in striking contrast to the languor of Cecile. Her face was in itself a poem. Her complexion was dark, but beautifully clear, and her cheeks were faintly tinged with the hue of the carnation. Her eyes were of a deep, dark grey, deepened now almost to black under the influence of emotion, and shaded by long black lashes that lay upon her cheeks. Her hair rippled away from her broad brows in a dusky mass, and fell about her shoulders in curls. Her sparkling, spirited face, with its sweet, sensitive mouth, glowing with scarlet colouring, revealed a grand and noble nature and a pure and lofty soul, which was now, and would be evermore, a stranger to deceit and guile.

What wonder that Lady Redwoode grew confused, and hesitated to choose between them?

The blonde beauty most resembled her, but when she would have claimed her the earnest eyes of Hellice touched a long-unused chord of her heart, and she imagined that from such eyes the husband of her early youth had looked at her during their brief season of love and happiness. The instinct, from which she had hoped so much, refused to assert itself, and she was obliged to depend upon her reason.

Tortured and bewildered, she looked from them to the ayah, with a wild cry of anguish on her lips.

"I cannot tell which is mine, Renee," she cried. "Tell me, which is your grandchild—which is the child of my brother?"

"I do not know myself," replied the Asiatic, in a tone that assured the Baronesse that further pleading would be equally in vain. "It is true, my lady, that I was present at the birth of your child, but I do not know which she is. And if I did," she added, "no bribes, tears, nor prayers could ever tempt me to betray to poverty and dependence the child of your brother's wife—my late mistress!"

Lady Redwoode knew well, from experience, that the ayah had an iron will, and that, as she had said, neither bribes nor tears would cause her to swerve from her fidelity to the interests of her grandchild. So, calming herself by a violent effort, she looked again upon the cousins.

During the momentary diversion of her ladyship's survey Cecile had stepped forward, leaving Hellice quite in the background. The eyes of the blonde beauty had deepened in their appealing expression, and she looked up with a confiding smile.

With a heart torn by conflicting emotions, the Baronesse advanced a step to meet her, glanced at the dark, earnest, lovely face of Hel-

lice with a wistful and undecided look, and then murmured:

"This is hard—cruel! Which is mine? Oh, for an inspiration to reveal to me my child!"

Cecile bent forward, her face flushing, and tears glistening her blue eyes, whispered only one word:

"Mother!"

The utterance of that holy name, for the first time addressed to her, decided the doubtful question in Lady Redwoode's mind. With a cry of joy she again opened her arms, which had drooped to her side, and welcomed within their clasp the fairer of the two girls. No doubt occurred in that moment of supreme bliss to mar her glorious happiness. Nature herself had solved the problem, she thought, by revealing the truth to her child. She covered the fair, beautiful face with tears and kisses; she invoked upon her the choicest of blessings; she called her by a host of sweet and tender epithets such as in her heart she had lavished upon her during all these years of enforced separation. She indulged in laughter and in weeping, holding away from her the sweet face that she might gaze upon it, feasting upon its beauty, and then drawing it again to the loving bosom, where had been so long a deep and aching void.

"I might have known it at once," she murmured. "The other is dark, like the ayah and my brother's wife, but this one is fair, like me. I might have recognised her as mine by her golden hair and her sweet blue eyes. There is no Hindoo look about her. She has grown to be what she promised when a babe!"

Again, with a mother's rapture, she covered her with caresses.

It seemed to Mr. Andrew Forsythe, and he had keen perception, that the blonde beauty rather suffered these caresses as an infliction than rejoiced in them as the outpourings of a mother's tenderness. She returned them, it is true, and murmured again and again the endearing epithet with which she had cut short the painful indecision of the Baronesse, but there was no great display of heart or soul in her manner. He caught himself wondering how Hellice, with her star-like eyes, sparkle and animation, would have acted had fate ordained that she should have been the chosen one.

Evidently Hellice had not expected to be so chosen. But still she drooped like a wounded bird when her cousin had been claimed as the daughter of the radiant lady, who looked to her like an angel of light.

The sparkle faded from her face, but was replaced by a look of tearful sympathy that stamped her at once as unselfish and generous. With true delicacy she motioned to the ayah, and retreated with her to the recess of the bay window, that the communion of mother and child might be without human witnesses. Mr. Andrew Forsythe followed them, and could not avoid noticing a sort of suppressed exultation in the manner of the ayah. What it betokened, however, he could not determine.

"You are disappointed, perhaps, Miss Glintwick," he said, with an attempt at soothing. "Yet your own heart must have prepared you for the result. There can be no doubt that Lady Redwoode's instinct has guided her safely and correctly. This young girl bears a striking resemblance to her ladyship in every feature. They have the same golden hair, the same blue eyes, but you must have observed the similarity yourself."

Hellice turned from the window, through which she had been gazing into the depths of the grove, and answered quietly:

"Yes, I noticed it, Mr. Forsythe. Papa was fair like Lady Redwoode, and in India our friends used to say that Cecile was his very image, only refined and womanised. There was a strong family resemblance between Lady Redwoode and papa."

The ayah frowned slightly, and remarked:

"Miss Hellice never took after the Glintwicks. But, as you say, Mr. Forsythe, a mother's instinct is a strange thing. I wouldn't

have believed it could have been so unerring—but what I said," she added, checking herself abruptly.

Mr. Andrew Forsythe was unable to determine whether she had spoken ironically, or otherwise. Her tone had been peculiar, and she had spoken as if thoughtlessly.

"Miss Hellice," he said, again addressing the rejected maiden, "although your cousin has proved to be the heiress, your aunt feels kindly disposed towards you. I am infringing upon her province, I know, in assuring you of her protection, but I cannot bear that you should feel desolate in the hour of your cousin's great happiness."

"Thank you," was the response, and Hellice raised to him a pair of grateful eyes that thrilled his heart with strange sensations. "Protection is all I expect, Mr. Forsythe. Ah, my aunt is calling me."

She bowed to him and turned to obey the summons with that quickness and grace which distinguished her. Passing out of the recess, followed by her late companions, she hastened to Lady Redwoode, with a light step, pausing before her and regarding her with a bright countenance.

"You are Hellice, my brother's daughter?" asked the Baroness, who was seated in a chair, with Cecile close beside her, and their hands clasped together.

"Yes, madam," replied Hellice.

"Have you anything to say, Hellice, against my choice between you?" asked her ladyship, pausing to bestow a beaming glance upon the chosen maiden.

"No, madam, nothing whatever. I expected you would claim Cecile."

"Indeed," said Lady Redwoode, in surprise. "You had reason to believe, then, that she was my child? Your heart told you, perhaps, the truth?"

Hellice did not answer, but her head drooped, and a strange pallor crept over her brow, cheeks, and lips. Her sensitive mouth quivered like a grief-stricken child's, and she seemed about to utter a protest. If such, however, were her intention, she changed it quickly, and looked up again, cheerful and contented.

"I only know, madam," she said, simply, "that I thought you would claim Cecile."

"It is as well," said her ladyship, playing with Cecile's golden hair. "I am glad you are not disappointed. You know the whole story, I suppose—how cruelly my brother wronged me?"

"Yes, madam," and a quick flush replaced the maiden's pallor. "Papa told us the whole story before he died!"

"Your father left you penniless, Hellice," said the Baroness, kindly, "but you shall feel neither poor nor dependant in my house. You cannot be the heiress, or share Cecile's place in my house or heart. You can see for yourself that such a thing would not be suitable. But you have been the friend and playmate of my daughter, and for her sake I will be a friend to you. Shall you be contented?"

"Yes, madam."

"You may call me Aunt Agatha, since I am your aunt," said her ladyship. "I am glad that you have not formed hopes that could only be blasted. For a year past I have been pleading with your father to restore me my child, but he did not reply to my letters. Recently I determined to go and boldly claim her. I was strong in the faith of my eventual success, and have employed many leisure hours in superintending the fitting-up of rooms for her use. Your own are near here. I hope you will be happy here!"

Hellice expressed her thanks very quietly, but with little enthusiasm. Apparently, she received her aunt's kindness as a mere offer of protection and a home, and was correspondingly grateful, but her heart was chilled. Despite her efforts, Lady Redwoode could not avoid giving a formal tone to her words. The cruelty of her late brother rose like an insurmountable and icy barrier between her and Hellice, and she could not greet her affection-

ately. Conscious of this, and pitying the lovely young girl, she leaned forward and pressed a kiss upon her forehead.

In a moment the grey eyes brimmed over with tears.

Lady Redwoode did not notice this emotion. Cecile had just pressed her ladyship's white hand to her lips, and the caress had stirred the mother's heart anew to its greatest depths.

"You look tired, my darling!" she said, tenderly bending over Cecile. "You are dusty, too, and travel-worn. How selfish I am to keep you with me when you want to refresh yourself by a change of toilet. Let me show you to your rooms, my love, and you shall tell me how you like them. But first let me introduce to you my late husband's nephew, Mr. Andrew Forsythe."

Mr. Andrew Forsythe came forward, and clasped the hand which the blonde beauty graciously extended. He murmured his congratulations to both mother and daughter, complimented Cecile on her resemblance to Lady Redwoode, and was charmed to see that the heiress appeared to regard him favourably.

"You must like Andrew, Cecile," said the Baroness, playfully. "He is almost a son to me, and I shall be disappointed if you do not become excellent friends. Now, come, my darling."

She drew Cecile's arm within her own, inclined her head to Andrew with a smile, intercepting the admiring glance he was about to bestow upon the lovely blonde, and then conducted her daughter from the apartment, followed by Hellice and the ayah.

They passed through a long wide hall that ran through the centre of the dwelling, mounted a flight of white marble stairs, with a richly carved balustrade, and with niches in the wall, from which statues gleamed, and gained a handsome upper corridor, which was lighted at one end by a great oriel window.

"The rooms upon the right," said Lady Redwoode, addressing Cecile, "belong to me. Those upon the left are yours. Hellice's rooms are in the tower, and are gained by yonder passage. I will ring for someone to show your cousin to her apartments—"

"Oh, no, mamma," interrupted Cecile, with childlike eagerness. "Let Hellice see my rooms, and then I will see hers."

The Baroness smilingly acceded to the request, saying:

"You simple child! It is some compensation, Cecile, to find you so childlike and innocent. I shall have a charming combination of child and woman at once in my daughter. How happy we shall be together! But here we are."

She threw open a door as she spoke, and the little party entered a charming boudoir provided with deep bay windows, and furnished exquisitely in blue and silver damask and carved rosewood.

The carpet presented a pattern of silver arabesques upon a pale-blue ground; the white lace curtains were looped up with azure ribbons brocaded with silver; the deep fauteils and ottomans were covered with the same pure colours.

The pictures on the walls had been selected by a refined and exquisite taste. The parian vases on the low marble mantel-piece were heaped high with odorous flowers, which presented the various shades of pink, scarlet, and crimson.

"How very beautiful!" exclaimed Cecile, her blue eyes sparkling with joy as she noted the costliness and elegance of the various adornments, and turned to a pretty cabinet loaded with choice ornaments. "How good you are, dearest mamma," and she caught Lady Redwoode's hand and kissed it.

The Baroness's face lighted up with pleasure. "The next room is your dressing-room," she said. "Let us go through the suite!"

Cecile danced on before her, pulling off her bonnet and veil, and permitting her golden hair to fall over her shoulders in a shining mass. Hellice followed slowly, hearing but not compre-

hending the volley of admiring exclamations to which the ayah gave utterance.

She was touched at the thoughtful mother-love that had dictated the arrangement of these rooms at a time when the daughter for whom they had been planned was ignorant of that mother's existence.

She said to herself, if Lady Redwoode had only been her mother, what devotion she would have yielded her, what passionate, filial love she would have offered her!

The dressing-room proved worthy of companionship with the boudoir. It was also furnished with the palest blue and silver, and its walls were panelled with plate-glass mirrors that reached from floor to ceiling.

Upon the marble-topped dressing-tables were deposited portable writing-desks, work-boxes, and a dressing-case, all exquisitely inlaid and completely furnished.

Not a luxurious or necessary appurtenance to a fashionable toilet was wanting, even an ebony jewel-case being discovered upon a lace-draped toilet-table.

Cecile was delighted beyond measure with everything, but she went into raptures over the jewel-case, which she found to contain a priceless set of pear-shaped pearls, necklace included, and a similar set of turquoise jewels of the most exquisite tinting.

"How good you are, darling mamma!" she said, breathlessly, holding up the gems to the light. "You seemed to know before I came that I was fair, for there is a tinge of blue in everything. If I had been dark like Hellice, I could not have worn these turquoises. They are not so dark as your eyes, mamma, but they remind me of them!"

"Flatterer!" said the Baroness, playfully. "Let me show you your bedchamber. I want to see how you like that."

Cecile dropped her jewels reluctantly and surveyed the adjoining bedroom. It was fitted up entirely white; a white, mossy carpet covering the floor, the snowy bed being draped with hanging lace that trailed upon the carpet; curtains of the same covering the windows, the chairs being covered in white embroidered silk, and white exotics blooming in sculptured vases. It was a pretty, pleasant room, and seemed fitted for the enjoyment only of the purest and sweetest of dreams.

Cecile was loud in her praise, but Hellice, with a long, deep breath, seemed to drink in its beauty.

She alone noticed the lovely view from the embayed windows, the glimpses of leafy coverts in the wood, where the tame deer browsed, and of the walled lake and the glimmering brook at the base of the hill.

She alone admired with appreciation the poetical arrangement of the lace drapery of the windows, the flowers, and trinkets, but she could see a smile and a tear in every token of care, and the pure, pretty room became sacred in her sight.

"I thought white the appropriate colour for a young girl's bedroom," said the Baroness, gravely and tenderly. "I am glad you are so pleased, Cecile. There remains but one room more—the bath-room."

She opened a door as she spoke, and revealed a charming little room, fitted up with pictures, a sea-green carpet, and with a beautifully-veined marble bath, shaped like a deep sea-shell. There was a faint rose tint in the marble, like that in the heart of a couch, and one could easily imagine that it had been brought from beds of red coral, where the green sea-waves play, and that mermaids had sported in its translucent basin.

"This is all," said Lady Redwoode, drawing Cecile to her. "May these rooms be really a bower of happiness to you, my child, as you have already named them a bower of beauty!"

Cecile embraced her ladyship with fervour, and protested that if she were not happy she would be the most ungrateful of daughters.

"They are the prettiest rooms I ever saw," she said. "I never even dreamed of anything

half so pretty. What do you think of them, Hellice?" she added, turning to her cousin.

"I have dreamed of such rooms," said Hellice, with mounting colour. "It seems to me that no one could harbour a wicked thought in them. They seem made for inspiring dreams and sweet visions."

She paused, embarrassed by Cecile's cold, surprised glance, and by Lady Redwoode's scrutinising gaze. With a conscious feeling that she had overstepped the bounds allotted to her, she subsided into silence.

"And you, Renee?" said Cecile, addressing the ayah. "Do you not think my rooms beautiful?"

"That I do, missy," said the Hindoo, enthusiastically. "Never were prettier rooms, and never was prettier owner, my sweet."

Cecile made a gesture, deprecating this flattery, and Renee became quiet and reserved at once. Lady Redwoode did not observe this little by-play, having turned to lead the departure, and Hellice was wrapped in thought.

To the latter these rooms were an Eden, and she sighed as she looked into the sunny recesses of the windows and at the pictures on the walls. Her life had been less sunny than Cecile's, and she fancied that this pleasant home would have been to her a very haven of rest into which neither care nor trouble could have entered.

She would gladly have lingered within their charmed precincts the remainder of the day, but felt compelled to follow her hostess and cousin to the rooms assigned to her use.

As the Baroness had remarked, these rooms were situated in one of the towers, and not far from those of Cecile. Unlike those of the favoured maiden, they had not enjoyed the personal supervision of her ladyship.

They were simply a set of chambers consisting of dressing-room, bedroom, and bath-chamber, *en suite*, which had been from time immemorial appropriated to the use of young lady visitors.

They were bright, sunny, and pretty, but their chief merits were their freshness and the exquisite view they commanded of woodland, meadows, and distant sea. The rooms were octagon-shaped and furnished with wide deep-seated windows, and their prevailing colours were crimson and white, a combination particularly pleasing to Hellice, who possessed warm, tropical tastes, and delighted in glowing colours.

"I like these rooms very much, Aunt Agatha," she said, gratefully, noting with pleasure a small, well-filled bookcase, a deep easy chair, and a wide, crimson silk-covered couch with ample pillows. "I shall be very happy here."

Cecile flitted through the rooms, expressing her admiration of their arrangement, secretly exulting over the superiority of her own apartments, and then, dismissing the ayah to her own chambers by a glance, put her arm through Lady Redwoode's and signified her wish to return to her domains. With a few kind words then to Hellice, the mother and daughter left the orphan to herself, and returned to the "blue room," as Cecile's boudoir had been named.

Here they spent a few moments together, Lady Redwoode rejoicing over her newly-discovered treasure, and Cecile endearing herself to her by childlike expressions of affection.

"It is worth all my years of suffering to find my daughter at last, so honest, so truthful, so gay, and so childlike," said the Baroness, an ineffable tenderness illumining her countenance. "You must be a good daughter, Cecile, to repay me for all my anxieties on your account. Now dress yourself, love, in your prettiest attire," she added, "for I wish to introduce you to my assembled household as my daughter and heiress, and their future mistress. My steward has already acquainted them all with the story of my first marriage, and these faithful family retainers are prepared to welcome you with due honours."

With a parting caress her ladyship quitted the room.

CHAPTER V.

On being left to herself and the attendance of her ayah the chosen heiress hastened to lock the door of her boudoir and to apply herself to a closer examination of her apartments and their contents. The blue eyes that had looked up to Lady Redwoode with such confiding innocence assumed a hard and speculating expression, as if calculating the cost of the various luxuries, but the countenance of the maiden was full of the most unalloyed satisfaction. She moved from one room to another, talking merrily to her attendant, and now and then yielding to a merry peal of laughter that rang out like the chimes of silver bells. She adorned herself with the jewels that had been given her, and admired their effect when contrasted with her golden hair, and commented upon their value as one who knew their worth.

"Well, Renee!" she said, at length, "my new mother has been very generous to me, has she not? With what ease I have stepped into a magnificent home fit for a princess! Mamma is going to introduce me to her servants as their young mistress, and I am sure she will make me the heiress of Redwoode. 'I am the most fortunate of beings!'"

"Indeed you are, Miss Cecile," returned the Hindoo, with a pleased and exultant look. "You were born for good luck. But it was a very slight chance that turned the balance in your favour. My lady looked from you to Miss Hellice and back again, not knowing which to choose. She was wonderfully attracted by your face and golden hair, but I could see that there was something in Hellice's eyes that fascinated her. If you hadn't called her mother as you did it is quite possible she might have chosen your cousin!"

Cecile frowned darkly, and shrugged her shoulders impatiently. It was wonderful, but her unpleasing change of expression gave an entirely different cast to her countenance. Despite the unchanging fact of their blonde character, her features assumed a singular and subtle resemblance to those of her Hindoo attendant, which the latter, who was gazing over her mistress's shoulder into a panelled mirror, was not slow to notice.

"Do not look that way, my darling," she said, significantly, "or Lady Redwoode will even yet prefer your cousin—"

"She will not—she shall not!" cried Cecile, passionately, her blue eyes flashing vividly. "If after I have been chosen as the heiress Lady Redwoode's mind be not at rest, or she shows indecision or dissatisfaction, I will send Hellice away. She shall not mar my triumph here!"

"But if she will not go?"

"She shall go! Has not my will always been law in our Indian home? Does Hellice doubt but that I am really Cecile Avon, the daughter of Lady Redwoode by a first marriage? If she does not, she is too proud to remain one night under this roof when I convince her that she is not wanted!"

Her voice sounded through the room with a fierceness and resolve that brought an approving smile to the Hindoo's lips.

"You are right, my beauty," she whispered. "But be secret and guarded in all you do. Let not Lady Redwoode suspect you of unkindness or jealousy towards your cousin. Her ladyship is keen-eyed and strong-willed. A trifle will remove you from your high pedestal and put Hellice in your place!"

"Say no more!" said Cecile, imperiously. "Dress me at once, Renee. I would not have Hellice go down to Lady Redwoode first!"

She softened her imperious tone as she concluded, and laid one little jewelled hand caressingly against the ayah's red-brown cheek. The latter placed the hand quickly to her lips and kissed it with passionate fervour, murmuring words of endearment in her native language. Cecile then took possession of a chair, and her attendant proceeded to attire her for her second interview with the Baroness, when she was to be acknowledged as her ladyship's daughter and heiress.

It was curious to observe with what tenderness and ability the ayah brushed out the straight and shining bands of hair, until they fell in an airy cloud about the girl's fair face and over her uncovered shoulders. Like a fond mother disrobing her little child, she removed the dusty travelling garments, and while her young mistress refreshed herself with a bath she unpacked the heavy trunks and selected the choicest articles belonging to the maiden's wardrobe.

When Cecile emerged from her bathroom, fresh and rosy, her form habited in a white dressing-gown and slippers, she found awaiting her a dainty repast, which had been brought to her by the especial orders of Lady Redwoode. A few minutes were given to the enjoyment of the fragrant tea, the crisp white rolls, the delicate broiled birds and the various delicacies upon the massive silver salver, and then the toilet was allowed to progress. It was soon completed, to the satisfaction of both mistress and maid, who coincided in the opinion that the young lady had never looked more beautiful.

Her toilet was indeed perfect. Her golden hair was coiled low at the back of her head, to deepen her resemblance to Lady Redwoode, and was confined there with long heavy pins headed with balls of gold studded with softly glowing gems. Her slender form displayed to advantage a fleecy, transparent robe of purest azure, sprinkled with shining stars, embroidered by cunning Indian hands with threads of spun gold. A cincture of flexible gold encircled her delicate waist, and upon her uncovered neck, on her arms, and drooping from her shell-like ears, were the tourquoise jewels that had been one of the gifts of the Baroness.

Cecile surveyed her reflection in a mirror with undisguised admiration.

"I look more like an Englishwoman than Hellice does," she said, turning her head from side to side. "My yellow hair has proved a greater fortune to me than if every thread were pure gold. I am going to the drawing-room, now, Renee, and I wish you to follow me to the lower hall, where you can witness my introduction to the household as Miss Avon. Come!"

She turned from the mirror, after a parting glance, and flitted through the rooms until she had reached the door of her boudoir.

Here she paused a moment, beckoned the Hindoo nearer, and drew close to her own dark face, kissing it repeatedly with child-like impulsiveness.

"Renee, darling!" she said, caressingly, "you know that you are to share my prosperity. When I am mistress here you shall have rooms of your own, and servants to wait upon you. But if Hellice were in my place she would send you away, without caring what might become of you. Before Lady Redwoode accepts me finally as her daughter she may again question you—"

"Fear nothing, my soft-eyed darling," replied the ayah, her tones tremulous with fondness. "This heritage shall be your own. I do not like Lady Redwoode, nor ought that belongs to her, because she looked coldly upon my daughter, the wife of her brother. I hate Hellice too, for many have thought her more beautiful than you, my golden-haired beauty! No, Cecile, many a time during our voyage, here, at midnight, when alone on deck, I read the stars, and they told me that you would be rich, grand, and honoured!"

"Did they?" asked Cecile, so eagerly that one could not fail to notice that there ran a vein of Eastern superstition through her nature, and that she believed thoroughly in her attendant's ability to "read the stars." "I shall be rich, grand, and honoured! Could anything more be desired? But will it last, Renee?"

A shadow flitted over the Hindoo's face as she responded:

"Of course it will. I could not read more, for the clouds always came and veiled the stars at the precise moment when I would

have snatched from them their greatest secret. I will try again to-night, Cecile. Now you must go!"

She unlocked the white, clinging arm from her neck, and opened the door, whispering her young mistress to be of good courage.

The caution was not needed. Cecile walked across the corridor and down the grand staircase with thorough ease and self-possession, bearing herself like a young queen.

Her countenance was a picture of serenity; her blue eyes glowed as tranquilly as the turquoises lying against her throat, and the colour in her cheeks was unvarying.

No one could have guessed from her manner that her heart was unquiet and troubled, or that she was disturbed by a single apprehension with regard to her position or future.

The ayah followed her at a little distance, and finally remained in the lower hall, awaiting the moment that should establish the name and rank of her young mistress.

With a bold, free step, Cecile advanced to the drawing room, opened the door, and entered.

Lady Redwoode awaited her there, and came forward to meet her, greeting her anew with caresses.

There was something in the manner of the Baroness, an uneasiness and inquietude which the maiden perceived, and which struck terror to her soul.

She imagined that her ladyship was not yet satisfied with regard to her daughter's identity, and she resolved to combat and overcome at once any doubts she might entertain, before Hellice should make her appearance.

Counterfeiting a charming shyness and timidity, she begged Lady Redwoode to resume her seat, and herself took possession of a heavy Moorish cushion, placing it close beside her ladyship.

Then, retaining the hand of the Baroness in

her own, after a child-like, clinging fashion, and leaning confidently against her, she whispered:

"Oh, mamma, how like a dream it all seems! I can hardly believe that I have found a home and a mother. You knew me at once as your child, did you not?"

"I believe I did, Cecile," said the Baroness, with agitation. "Oh, my child, you do not know the cruel position in which I am placed! I thought my instinct would tell me which was my daughter, but at the critical moment I found myself confused and bewildered. I believed that you were my very own, for my baby was fairer than my brother's, and promised to look like me, and you do resemble me, Cecile, darling. My brother's wife had Hindoo blood, and was dark and swarthy. Surely this dark-skinned Hellice belonged to her, and yet she looked at me with dark-grey eyes very like those of my lost Rolf. What can I think, Cecile? Look up at me, my love, and tell me if your heart has owned me for your mother?"

Cecile looked up as requested, her blue eyes shining through her tears, and her face full of a tender reproach that needed not the interpretation of words.

"I knew you at once as my mother," she said, "just as Hellice knew that you were nothing to her. Oh, mamma, do you doubt that I am your daughter?"

The lovely face of Lady Redwoode flushed and paled, and a pained look appeared in her eyes.

"Cecile," she exclaimed, clasping more closely the hand of the maiden, and speaking with wild anguish of tone, "I am cruelly bewildered. I know not what to think. You are all I expected to find in my daughter; you look as I imagined you would; you are the timid, gentle, loving child I have pictured you. But if you are my child, why does the mother of my late sister-in-law prefer you to her own grandchild?"

She went to your room, leaving Hellice alone. She kept nearer to you, and showed far more love and interest in you than in the daughter of her dead child. It is this fact that disturbed my confidence in our relationship, and has made me question if I have not been guided by impulse rather than instinct."

She looked at Cecile appealingly, and her glance might have moved a heart of stone. The blood slowly mounted to the girl's blonde face, and her blue eyes drooped, as if she were unable to meet the glances of the Baroness. But only a single moment, however, was she lacking in self-command.

A minute later her answer was ready, and her every nerve was strung to desperation.

(To be continued next week.)

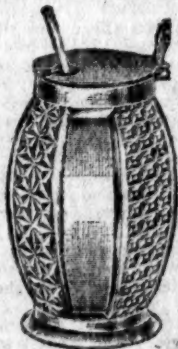
(This story commenced in No 2013. Back numbers can be obtained through any News-agent.)

DOMESTIC TRAINING.

A practical training in the art of successful housekeeping should be an essential element in the education of our girls. If there is one thing above another that will disturb the peace and harmony of a family it is the inefficiency of the wife or mother to properly conduct the affairs of the household.

The young girl to-day who has mastered an art, can play the piano, and sing passably well is apt to think that her education is finished. Not so. There is much still to be learned, would she fit herself for the more important domestic duties to which nine out of every ten girls are sooner or later called. The woman, the mother, may properly be called the main-spring of the home. It is she who dictates the policy of the household and presides over the destiny of its inmates.

10,000 VALUABLE PRIZES



Our various Competitions having been so successful, and as the Dainty Salt Cellar and Pepper-Box have so pleased our readers, we think our friends would like to complete the set, and win this handsome **Mustard-Pot**, which is made in exactly the same style as the Salt Cellar and Pepper-Box, as illustrated here. **EVERYONE** who sends in a correct solution will receive the **Mustard-Pot**. You may give it away, keep it, or sell it when you have won it, but we cannot send more than three prizes to anyone however many correct solutions they may send in.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Each one of the three lines of figures below spells the name of an English Warship, and we want you to tell us the names. There are 26 letters in the alphabet, and we have used figures in spelling the names instead of letters. Letter A is number 1, B number 2, C number 3, and so on right through the alphabet. If you can **spell out the three names you can have one of the prizes**. When you have solved this Puzzle you must **cut out this advertisement** and send with **Twelve Penny Stamps** as Entrance Fee. Unless this is done no notice will be taken of your letter.

10	21	18	9	20	5	18				
13	1	7	14	9	6	9	3	5	14	20
18	5	14	15	23	14					

SEND YOUR ANSWER TO-DAY.

Don't delay a single moment. Sit down and puzzle out these three names, and send your answer to The Puzzle Editor, "LONDON READER" Office, 50-52, Ludgate Hill, London. This Advertisement and the twelve penny stamps must be sent with your answer. If you are correct we will send your PRIZE at once, and when your friends see the reward that your ingenuity has won, we know that they will purchase a copy of the "LONDON READER," so as to try for our great Twentieth Century Competition.

CUT THIS OUT

BEAUTIFUL PRIZES

CUT THIS OUT

Statistics

LAST year the total number of vessels entering Japanese ports was 1,330, with a tonnage of 9,606,752 tons, and of these 2,645 were Japanese ships, with a tonnage of 3,363,657 tons, a most remarkable development when we remember that a quarter of a century ago the Japanese had no steamships.

The largest camera ever made in Scotland, if not in Great Britain, has just been completed. It will take pictures 50in. by 45in. In building the camera and three slides 450 square feet of mahogany have been used, and there are 106 brass bindings, weighing about half a cwt., and 1,560 screw nails.

AMONG the contents of the British Museum the Elgin marbles represent an enormous value. They have been variously estimated as being worth £1,000,000, £2,000,000, and £3,000,000 the Elgin marbles represent an enormous value. In 1816 the Government paid Lord Elgin only £35,000 for them. Yet to-day the single figure of Theseus would fetch at least some three times that sum could it be put up to auction. The Rosetta Stone might fetch anything from £100,000 to £250,000. The Nineveh bulls with human heads would be cheap at £50,000, and—in other words, they are priceless; although the Assyrian lions would undoubtedly bring as much.

Gems

ARGUMENTS are like birchings; only those know their value who have ceased to have any need of them.

LAYING the axe to the branches instead of "the root of the tree" will not keep new ones from sprouting.

NOTHING travels faster than thought, but some people's thoughts never travel far from themselves.

AVOID a slanderer as you would a scorpion; both sting for the mere pleasure of doing it.

MANY people are busy in the world gathering together a handful of thorns to sit upon.

WHAT the dew is to the flower gentle words are to the soul.

Fashion Notes

FIGURED poplins are among the pretty, stylish dress goods of the season. There is a small figure in black upon all colours combined with clusters of dots of a lighter shade than the material or one of the shades blending into it. For instance, a dark-blue poplin will have tiny dots of a bright blue, on brown the dots will be yellow, and on black, white. On all are the small black figures, and the dots are so tiny as to be hardly discernible, mere pin pricks. This is the return to a pattern of a good many years ago.

BLACK and white stripes in silk shirt waists are as popular as the same colours in stocks; indeed, stripes of every description are considered the most stylish thing in both flannel and silk. Roman effects and broadly-striped flannels are being made into waists for both large and small women to a greater extent than ever before. Some of the striped flannels have remarkably pretty tints.

AN attractive novelty is a flannel shirtwaist of a medium dark-green striped with black at intervals of three-quarters of an inch. There is a yoke to the waist cut to allow the stripes to run diagonally, while they run up and down in the body of the garment. The buttons are not large, and are covered with the material.

A REVERSIBLE silk skirt is something new. It is black on one side and is of a light shade on the other. The reverse side is in some garments a black and white plaid. This is certainly an economical novelty.

SOME of the new evening slippers have a double row of straps buttoning directly up the middle of the ankle.

A WHITE chiffon box is edged with a narrow ribbon in black and white.

An Australian Marvel.

A discovery which was made a few years ago in Australia by an eminent scientist, Mr. Charles Forde, is now gradually revolutionising the old methods of dealing with liver and kidney ailments and disorders of the digestive system. After overcoming apparently insurmountable difficulties, he succeeded in obtaining a purely vegetable substance which has the peculiar property of acting on the human system in exactly the same way as nature's animal substance, bile. After much careful study he combined this substance with some eight other vegetable ingredients, and then concentrated the product so obtained until a suitable dose could be compressed into the space offered by a small bean. This medicine, made up in the form of a "bean for the bile," soon became widely known as "Bile Beans."

Its effect on long-standing cases of indigestion, loss of appetite, weakness, nervous debility, palpitation, headache, constipation, piles, and female ailments and irregularities, is so wonderfully satisfactory, that in Australia at the present time Charles Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness is not only a household term, but is synonymous with the best home medicine known. For some time now, laboratories have been open in England, and already the power of this medicine has been so well proved that the public confidence in it is daily increasing. No less than 300,000 doses are taken daily in the provinces alone—a fact which of itself is adequate proof of the excellence of this medicine as a household remedy. Charles Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are not only a certain cure for the disorders mentioned above, but will be found invaluable in all cases of dizziness, bad breath, rheumatism, the weakening effects of influenza, and the numerous ailments which always attend a bad condition of the blood and digestive organs. For female ailments and irregularities they are a perfect boon.

They are sold by all chemists at threepence halfpenny and two shillings and ninepence per box. Should you be in ill-health and in doubt whether or not Bile Beans are suitable to your case, you may write, giving full particulars of your condition, to the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119, London Wall, London, E.C., and you will be honestly answered, free of charge, whether or not Bile Beans have ever cured a case similar to your own.

The Bile Bean Manufacturing Co. will send you a free sample of Bile Beans if you forward this coupon to their Central Distributing Depot, Greek Street, Leeds (Yorks), along with full name and address and a penny stamp to pay return postage.

FREE SAMPLE
COUPON.
BILE BEANS.
"LONDON READER,"
DEC. 7.

THE DEEP SEA PEARL.

The love of my life came not
As love unto others is cast;
For mine was a secret wound—
But the wound grew a pearl, at last,
The divers may come and go,
The tides, they arise and fall;
The pearl in its shell lies sealed,
And the deep sea covers all.

"No, sir," said a passenger on a steamship to the captain, "I am not seasick, but I am disgusted with the motion of this vessel."

TAKING CHARGES.—BROWN: "Heard about the burglary in Smith's! They must have been a desperate set of fellows." MRS. BROWN: "What did they do?" BROWN: "Made their way into the kitchen and ate some of Miss Smith's home-made cake."

Facetiæ

Father: "Where did you learn that new piece?" Daughter: "It isn't a new piece. The piano has been tuned."

JUST A BEGINNER.—She: "Has she many friends in society?" He: "Oh, yes; she hasn't been in long, you know."

"Well, Pat, have you learned to ride your bicycle yet?" "Sorra a bit. Sure Oi can't aven balance meself standing still, let alone roidin'."

AMIALE ADVICE.—He: "It was hard work to keep from kissing you last night." She: "Well, you must be careful not to over-exert yourself, Jack."

Diner: "I say, waiter, this cod steak isn't nearly as good as the one I had here last week." Waiter: "Indeed, sir! That is very strange; it's off the same fish!"

LITERALLY INTERPRETED.—Sympathising Friend: "Did you love your husband so very dearly?" The Widow: "I should say so!" Sympathising Friend: "Yes, but did you?"

WHEN THE TEMPERATURE FELL.—"I'm so worried about Brother Henry," said Clara to her caller. "I do hope he'll come out all right." "How long was he sent up for?" asked Mr. Hunker, sympathetically.

UNPROFITABLE AND UNPARDONABLE.—Miss Trust: "What would you say of a man who does nothing all the evening but make sheep's eyes?" Miss Behave: "I simply wouldn't waste my time with such a mutton-head!"

WHY THEY SMOKE.—Young Woman (on top of tram-car): "I don't see why some men are bound to smoke every moment they are on a car." Old Woman (loudly): "Oh, let 'em smoke, poor fellows. I s'pose their wives won't let 'em smoke at home."

CERTAINLY EXTRAORDINARY.—Facetious Diner (to very tall and exceedingly procrastinating servant): "For more than one reason you might be called a long waiter." Waiter: "Yes; I sometimes measure half a day from tip to tip, sir."

A MODERN IMPROVEMENT.—Tailor: "Married or unmarried?" Customer: "Married." Tailor (to cutter): "One pocket concealed in lining of vest." Customer: "Eh! What's that?" Tailor (explaining): "To hide your change, you know, at night. I'm married myself."

SHE SAW.—Husband: "You'll have to discharge Dinah, and do the cooking yourself."

Wife: "Mercy on us! Are you losing your money?"

Husband: "No; but I'm losing my health."

Wife: "Oh, I see."

Husband: "Yes. The doctor says I eat too much."

HE'D BEEN BACKED.—Horseman: "That is a remarkably fine animal you are driving, madam." Lady: "Oh, I wouldn't part with this horse for the world. He's just as gentle as can be, and real fast, too." Horseman: "So I should judge. Has he ever been backed against any noted trotters?" Lady: "Well, I don't know, but it seems to me we back against pretty much everything in the street every time I attempt to turn around."

MISTAKEN, PERHAPS.—Seedily-dressed Stranger: "Madam, I have called for the suit of clothes which needs brushing and pressing." Lady of the House: "What suit?" "Your husband's best suit, ma'am. He called at the shop as he went to the city this morning." "And he said I was to let you have them?" "Yes'm." "Did he appear in good health and spirits?" "Why, certainly." "Look and act naturally?" "Of course. Why do you ask?" "Because he has been dead eighteen years, and I have some curiosity on the subject." "I—have made a mistake perhaps." "Perhaps you have. The man you saw go out of here an hour ago was my brother. Good morning."

NO WONDER.—Mistress: "What makes your potatoes so soggy?" New Cook: "Please, mum, the water they was boiled in was very wet."

HE WOULDN'T TELL.—First Broker: "Did you win or lose in that big drop in stocks today?" Second Broker (loftily): "That's my business, sir. Say, can you direct me to Lip-ton's Restaurant?"

A SHAMELESS MAID.—Miss Highupp: "I think Miss Globetrot ought to be ashamed of herself. She says she found the paintings of the old masters dreadfully stupid." Miss Way-up: "So do many others." Miss Highupp: "Yes, but she says so."

HOIST BY HIS OWN PETARD.—Billie (to Stark, with a perambulator): "Hello! That your baby?"

Stark (trying to be smart): "No; it's one I borrow of a neighbour."

"So? It's a homely little brute, isn't it?"

AGAINST HER RULE.—"Cholly Diesmore proposed to me last night," confided Miss Bunting to Miss Kilduff.

"Did you ask him if he could support you in the style to which you have been accustomed?"

"Oh, dear, no! I never ask that question of men who propose to me."

HIGHLY INTELLIGENT CLOTH.—Customer: "See here! Look at these pants! Bought 'em only yesterday, and they've shrunk half-way up to my knees." Dealer: "Mein friend, it ees raining." "Of course it is raining." "Und dose pants is wet." "I should say they were wet. You didn't expect me to keep them dry, did you?" "No; I only expects you to keep dose bottoms clean." "They are clean." "Yah, das is recht. But think how dirty they would be if they was not made off our fine imported patent self-regulating cloth, vat raises dose bottoms out off de mud!"

THE WORM TURNS.—Publisher (testily): "I can't see anything in that manuscript of yours." Struggling Author (vindictively): "I presume not; but you know some of your readers may be quite intelligent."

JIMMIE'S QUERY.—"All of you who never told a lie raise your hands," asked the teacher of her small pupils.

"Please, ma'am," piped little Jimmie; "is it a lie if nobuddy finds it out?"

"I GUESS," said the man who was waiting for his train, "I guess there's a lot of idiots who bother you with nonsensical questions, aren't there?"

"Yes," replied the man in the bureau of information; "particularly those who ask the question you just put."

AT THE HOSPITAL.—"To be sure," said the kindly minister to the man who had lost both his legs in a railway accident, "you have been seriously injured, but you must be grateful that your life is spared."

"Yes," said the sufferer, trying to look cheerful; "I can't kick."

TOO MUCH OF IT.—Medium: "I can tell you about a buried treasure."

Patron: "Please don't. My husband is always tooting that in my ears."

Medium: "Does he know anything about a buried treasure?"

Patron: "Yes; his first wife."

A SECRET DIVULGED.—"Marriage," remarked the woman of the world, "brings a man out." "I guess that's right," sighed the unsophisticated woman. "Since I've been married my husband has been out about five nights every week."

DIPLOMAT.—First Boy: "It's six o'clock. Let's go home."

Second Boy: "Nit! If we go home now we'll git licked fer stayin' so late. If we stay till eight we'll git hugged and kissed fer not bein' drowned."

"THEY say 'beggars can't be choosers.' That's ridiculous."

"Think it is, eh?"

"Yes; a beggar got into our hallway yesterday, and chose the best of half-a-dozen umbrellas that were there."

NELL: "Has Mr. Sloboche proposed to you yet?"

Belle: "No. He reminds me of a self-evident truth."

"How do you mean?"

"He goes without saying."

AN ACCOMMODATING CHEMIST.—Chemist (to poor woman): "You must take this medicine three times a day after meals."

Patient: "But, sir, I seldom get meals these 'ard times."

Chemist (passing on to next customer): "Then take it before them."

HAND ORGANS from 20s.



Made in 3 Sizes, in black and gold case. Full organ tone. Complete, with 6 tunes. Plays all songs, hymns, and dance music. Sent on receipt of P.O. 5s. If desired, write for terms to pay 5s. monthly. List of tunes and catalogue.

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BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

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J. FORT.—A mausoleum is a term descriptive of a large tomb, or one of uncommon architectural pretensions. It is so called from the splendid tomb erected to King Mausolus, of Caria, at Halicarnassus, in the year 352 B.C., by his widow, Artemisia.

JACK.—Dumb-bell exercise will toughen the muscles of your arms. Begin with those four or five pounds in weight, and exercise from ten to fifteen minutes morning and evening. But do not engage in this work after eating, unless two hours have elapsed.

A. M. R.—Your eyes are seriously affected, and only an experienced oculist, after a personal examination, can successfully treat you. From your description of the malady it must be more than a mere inflammation of the lids. Consult a skilful practitioner without delay.

T. HARDWICH.—Persons who stammer should never attempt to speak until the lungs are full of air, and while the act of breathing out continues. To do so while inhaling air increases the affliction, and the effort to speak is attended with much more difficulty than when the breath is issuing from the lungs. We have heard that this affliction is alleviated by singing the words the victim desires to speak, or by accompanying every syllable with the motion of the hand or foot. When stammering is caused by a malformation of the organs of speech, inflammation or enlargement of the tonsils, or some local affection of the vocal organs, a physician would be the proper person of whom to seek advice.

A SUBSCRIBER FROM 1873.—It formed part of a scheme for obtaining new subscribers.

J. WILLOW.—To remove varnish or old paint from woodwork, apply an emulsion formed of two parts of ammonia shaken up with one part of turpentine. This so softens the paint that after a few moments it can be scraped or rubbed off.

INQUIRER.—After the death of a wife, the husband should allow at least three months to elapse before he begins to pay regular visits to another eligible lady. If he seeks female consolation earlier, the inference would be that he has soon forgotten the affection in which he held his wife.

HELICK.—It is usual for lovers, who have consented to break off a matrimonial engagement to return each other's letters. Etiquette demands that the gentleman should be the first to perform this duty. The reason is very evident—to show his willingness to spare the lady any anxiety lest he should be ungentlemanly enough to exhibit her correspondence to a third party. The lady is bound to be equally considerate, and immediately after the receipt of her love missives should return his. Then both may discover that they have been very silly in giving written expression to ardent sentiments of love.

JOHN.—Perhaps the most important surrender in the annals of modern warfare, considered with regard to the number of men surrendered, was that of Metz, on October 27, 1870. As a fortified place, Metz, with its surrounding forts, was practically impregnable, but had generalship permitted it to be completely surrounded and cut off. The surrender included three field-marshal, sixty-six generals, six thousand officers of low degree, over four hundred guns, one hundred mitrailleuses, nearly sixty standards, and one hundred and seventy-three thousand rank and file. This surrender utterly disheartened the French, and marked the beginning of the end of the Franco-Prussian war.

THE MOST NUTRITIOUS.

EPPS'S

GRATEFUL—COMFORTING.

COCOA

BREAKFAST—SUPPER.



ANNIE.—It is usual for a lady, when a matrimonial engagement has been broken off, to return all costly presents received from the gentleman to whom she was affianced. Still, we agree with you that he who demands their return is a mean fellow.

PHILATELIST.—A philatelist is a person who is fond of collecting and classifying postage stamps. The word is derived from the Greek words "philos," a friend or lover, and "ateleis," exemption from taxation. Taxation, at the time it derived its name in Greek, was enforced by issuing a small printed piece of paper or check, for the same purpose that the postage stamp is now issued.

ROSBELL.—1. To remove freckles, wash the affected parts frequently with a liniment composed of equal parts of sweet oil, lime-water, and spirits of ammonia.—Distilled elder-flower water is also an excellent application for removing freckles. The skin should be bathed with it for five or ten minutes, and washed afterward with clear water, night and morning. 2. The gift of reading a person's character from the handwriting has been denied to man.

NEMO.—It is said that arsenic is a beautifier of the complexion, but it is a dangerous drug to use, and should be avoided unless when prescribed by a physician. The hunters and woodcutters of Austria eat it to enable them to ward off fatigue. It is taken fasting, usually in a cup of coffee, the first dose being minute, but increased day by day until it sometimes amounts to the enormous dose of twelve or fifteen grains. If a confirmed arsenic eater suddenly attempts to do altogether without the drug he immediately succumbs to the effects of arsenical poisoning.

KENNETH.—The laughing plant grows in Arabia, and is so called because the seeds produce effects like those caused by laughing gas. The flowers are of a bright yellow, and the seed-pods are soft and furry, while the seeds resemble small black beans. Only two or three grow in a pod. The natives dry and pulverise them, and the powder, taken in small doses, makes the soberest person behave like a clown or a madman, for he will dance, sing, and laugh most boisterously, and cut the most fantastic capers, and be in an uproariously ridiculous condition for about an hour. When the excitement ceases, the exhausted exhibitor of these antics falls asleep, and on awakening he has no remembrance of his absurd performances.

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YOUNG WIFE.—To remove mildew from linen, dampen the spot with soft water and rub it well with soap; then rub the part affected with plenty of powdered French chalk. Place the linen on the line, and, as it dries, dampen it again. If all traces of mildew have not disappeared, renew the application of the chalk until all the marks are out.

C. L. P.—Here is a simple and effectual remedy for hoarseness: Boil two ounces of flaxseed in one quart of water; strain, and then add two ounces of rock candy, half a pint of syrup of honey, and the juice of three lemons; mix, and then boil together. Let it then cool, and bottle for use. Take one cupful as warm as you can drink it before going to bed.

W. ANDREWS.—Here is a recipe for furniture polish: Dissolve four ounces best shellac in two pints 95 per cent. alcohol; add to this two pints linseed oil and one pint spirits of turpentine; when mixed add four ounces sulphuric ether and four ounces spirits of ammonia; mix thoroughly. Shake when used, and apply with a sponge lightly. This is an excellent article, especially where the varnish has become old and tarnished.

ROBERT.—In the winter the sun is about three millions of miles nearer the earth than in the summer. The reason why the temperature is highest in summer—although the earth is farther from the sun at that time—is that, on account of the inclination of the earth's axis, the rays of the sun fall almost vertically, or perpendicularly, on the earth's surface at that season of the year. At other seasons they fall more or less obliquely; and the more obliquely they fall the less heat they possess.

TWENTY-SIX YEARS READER.—I am afraid you will have some difficulty in getting your money returned. I have heard of cases similar to yours, and you must be prepared for a little trouble before you get your rights. As you live in Lambeth I advise your going to Brown- ing Hall, York Street, Walworth, and consult the poor man's lawyer, who attends there one day a week. Take all particulars, and be guided by what he tells you. You can easily find out the night he attends on application at the Hall.

W. CLAY.—You are entirely too friendly with your sister's fiancé, and it not strange she has become jealous. Both you and he deserve the censure administered by the aggrieved lady. It was no excuse for you to say that you "meant nothing serious" by seeking his attentions and society at every favourable opportunity, with the result that you caused his affianced wife intense annoyance and grief. He must be a very thoughtless fellow to thus neglect the lady to whom he is engaged. She has certainly received sufficient provocation to break the engagement.

DELICATE.—You tell me that you have known a young man for some time, but it is only during the last month that you have been "walking out" with him. Now you are going away, and you want to know if, during your absence, you should be the first to write to him. I should say no; wait until you hear from him. If he is anxious about you, depend upon it he will soon find an excuse for writing to you. Possibly he may drop a word before you leave that he would like to have your new address, in which case I think you might give it to him.

AMY.—Good teeth enhance the attractiveness of man or woman, and no woman can be considered beautiful without them. They should, therefore, be kept in good condition by frequent attention. Use a good dentifrice, which may be procured at any drug store, and never apply warm water to cleanse them. Never brush sideways, which causes recession of the gums, but always with an up and down movement. And avoid, above all things, very stiff tooth-brushes and very large ones. The medium sized, with soft bristles, are more healthy for the gums, and will keep the teeth clean and free from foreign substances.

Secrets That Should Be Kept

It is a fact pretty well established that in most things men and women are essentially different.

And, taking this fact into consideration, it is wonderful how men and women live together generation after generation, disagreeing in almost everything, and agreeing to disagree, and having, in the main, quite a comfortable time of it.

Not that it is intended to convey the idea that even the best of them do not have their little "tiffs," when he takes refuge in cigars and newspapers, and she tells him she hates him!—yes, hates him!—and she wishes she had married the other one, and then she flings herself out of the room, and goes upstairs, and cries, and he slams the door, and rushes off to the club.

And after she has cried as long as she feels like it, she bathes her eyes, crimps her hair, powders her nose where it is reddest, and gets ready to receive him kindly when he comes home. And, generally, he is quite ready to be so received.

That sort of thing is all in a lifetime, and it does not do anybody any particular hurt. It is perfectly natural, and such little disturbances clear the matrimonial air, just as a summer thunder shower clears the atmosphere we breathe.

But there are wives who sulky, and act upon one's nerves like a cold north-east rainstorm. And there are wives who make it a point to relate and recount all the faults and shortcomings of their husbands to their sympathising female relatives and friends.

And right here, let it be said, for the honour of mankind in general, that it is not often one encounters a man who likes to tell the world about the faults of his wife.

Every sensible woman should keep her own counsel as regards the "outs" of her husband. She took him for better or worse, and if she got the worst of the bargain let her try and make the best of it. It will not mend matters to take the world into her confidence.

And, ten to one, the neighbours do not need to be told about how matters are. It is likely they have known it all along, and have enjoyed many a pleasant little gossip over it, for people do like to talk about the marital differences of their neighbours.

And it never yet converted a bad husband into a model for any third person to meddle in his matrimonial infelicities. The well-wishing female aunt, or the diplomatic and confidential female cousin, coming into a family council, looking toward the reformation of an erring husband, never wrought anything but evil, so far as we have observed.

If you have a poor husband—that is, a husband who does not suit you—make the best of him, unless you wish to go through a divorce court. Nothing can endure for ever, and, sooner or later, you or he will die, and there will be a change. Life is short, and no husband, be his will and constitution ever so good, can torment a wife for ever. If he dies she will be free, and if she dies he can't get at her to trouble her any more; so, in any event, the time will come when she will be rid of him. Keep that in mind, and let it comfort you, for it is always well to look at a vexed and perplexing question in all its bearings.

The wife who is sensible will guard sacredly the faults of her husband. She may be "mad enough with him to kill all creation," but let her keep her trouble to herself. By and by she will not feel so. She will cool down. So will he. And they will be mutually as sweet as they were in their courting days, and some of the glamour of that enchanted period will come back, and he will call her "dearest" and "baby" and "sweetheart," and she will call him "old tootsy wootsy," and then—But let the curtain fall.

"To err is human; to forgive, divine."

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